Lessons Learned From Our Winter Conference

On February 12, 2022 over a hundred and fifty BTU members registered to take part in our annual winter conference. This year’s theme was “Cozy Up to the Contract” and the goals included a “focus on fighting burnout, prioritizing educator well-being, and ramping up our wellness and de-stressing. It was also our first major in-person event, and as members to focus on wellness and de-stressing. It was also our first major in-person event, with special considerations taken to ensure everyone’s safety and health.

Unfortunately, what was planned that day was not able to be executed in the manner in which those who had worked hard to put the day together had hoped for and imagined. Instead, what began as a hopeful day centered in togetherness, healing and building strength within our BTU community was disrupted by a small group of protesters who caused much harm to those who were there. The lessons learned were not just those that were originally planned, but important ones nonetheless.

The day prior to the conference, a planned protest already outside of the BTU by an organized group of mostly public safety union members who oppose the city’s vaccine policy, which requires vaccination for continued employment. We were aware of the protest as a dozen or so people gathered at the start of the two-hour protest, it grew at one point to a couple dozen, and then dispersed after two hours. Although our parking lot and building are private property, we did not ask the protesters to leave. To their credit, once they were given a chance to leave and was heckled before being told she was not me. Black staff and E-board members took the brunt of the vitriol and compared those who didn’t support the unvaccinated with perpetrators in the Civil Rights movements and the Holocaust.

That rhetoric, those actions, and the harm caused has absolutely no

- **President’s Report** Jessica J. Tang

See more on the BTU’s Winter Conference on pages 4 & 5.

- **See page 8**
**Commentary**  
Michael J. Maguire

**My Third First Year of Teaching**

During snow and ice storms I picked up David Russell’s book To Change The World: Reflections of a Teacher and found it quite applicable to how I see our profession during The Great Resignation. David’s introduction states what many of us – including myself – are thinking about: leaving education. In David’s case he is talking about his retirement after 34.5 years of teaching, 32 of them at the McKinley. In my case, and in conversations with so many of my colleagues, we are contemplating our own exit from teaching. Let me say now what I say most often: I love teaching. I do. Teaching is the most important, most rewarding, and most challenging task a person can undertake. As a teenager I could have dedicated my education to medicine, accounting, or engineering. I had the grades for those professions but instead I focused on the law, double majoring in Political Science and Classical Languages. I had the background and the grades but when it was time to apply to law school I no longer had the desire.

I went, instead, full time in what had been my part time job since I first got my working papers. I worked full time as the dairy manager in the Sudbury Farms grocery store in Randolph. That job was good for me for a while as I figured out what I wanted to do. However, since I didn’t really figure out what I wanted to do, like so many of my fellow Gen Xers, I prepared for law school. Fortunately for me, I got a call asking me to be a substitute teacher...and the rest is history. 28 years later I am still in the job I love.

Until the pandemic changed things. As I am sure you have all heard before, the pandemic didn’t really change things, it only shone a light on an already untenable situation. I like to think the pandemic poured gasoline on an already smoldering fire. Our job was always impossible, lately it’s become unenjoyable too.

Enter David Russell’s memoir. David did what I was told to do. When I was a rookie teacher my former tenth grade health teacher, Mr. Lavey, advised me to keep a journal of my first year of teaching. I wish I had. David Russell seemingly kept a log of all his teaching experiences. Even though I am in my 26th year of teaching, this year feels like I was starting over. Being remote for a year and a half felt like a different job and a different life altogether, it was like my second time starting new. Returning to the classroom, a classroom frozen in time, was like walking into a classroom for the first time again. It felt like my third first time teaching.

In 1994, when it actually was my first year, my mentor, Mr. William F. Sullivan, gave me friendly advice on various topics. Now as I read Mr. Russell’s reflections, I get that same friendly vibe. In one of his reflections from over twenty years ago David wrote about the difficulty of motivating reluctant learners. It’s hard to explain to those not currently teaching, but something this year is collectively off. There is a malaise which permeates everything. And it’s not just one thing. It’s not wearing masks or participating in COVID testing pools. It’s rather like the ennui at the beginning of Avengers’s End Game, for many of our students have lost loved ones to the coronavirus.

After having been told that education was the path to a brighter future, the pandemic interrupted their learning. After having spent over a year at home – with all the accompanying liberties and autonomy – many of my high school students are questioning the meaning of it all. Their worlds came to a quick and unceremonious end two years ago, and although they are back in school, things are not what they expect or remember. They chafe at being told to use the bathroom only when they ask when last year they could do as they pleased. They dislike coming to school for the work but not being able to do the “fun” activities they took for granted pre-pandemic. Sure, we adults can intellectualize the need for social distancing, but to children they only know that they are back in school but can’t go on field trips or play games/sports or hang out with friends. Things are improving, sports are back on, but we are not in the same place we were pre-pandemic and the students feel it.

So what to do? In his 1999 essay for the Boston Writing Project Summer Institute called Motivating Reluctant Learners David gives sage and universal advice. “The number one motivator is the personal relationship you can develop… and catch (the students) doing good things.” What caught my attention is his advice on grades.

“Grading has gotten something of a bad reputation among many teachers these days, but I think grading can be used as a way of structuring a classroom for success and as a way to motivate students. Many students hate grades because they feel they cannot earn any good ones, either because they are not capable or because grades are based on the subjective judgement of teachers.”

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**The “I Have A Future” Coalition met at the Massachusetts State House on Thursday, February 24, 2022 for the 14th Annual Youth Justice Rally**

The goal of the rally was to take action in support of legislative advocacy on such issues as youth jobs, education, housing, family justice, young adults, and leaders across Massachusetts presented their perspectives on how to shift disparities young people experience across these issues and share demands that improve mental health, create safer environments, and uplift resources (both in our schools and in our communities).

– Photos by Natalia Cuadra-Saez
What is the Role of the School Site Council’s Personnel Subcommittee in Hiring?

The role of the Personnel Subcommittee of the SSC is to (1) review and adopt the list of candidates for the bargaining unit staff, in the transfer of BTU teachers’ bargaining unit staff from other than their original site for more than one year, and (2) determine the schedules and procedures for reviewing applications for candidates for positions, if any, and to make recommendations to the SSC. The Personnel Subcommittee is comprised of the Principal/Headmaster, two teachers and one parent as well as one student on the high school level (who are elected members of the SSC). Decisions are urged to be made by consensus. Decisions need to be formalized by majority vote with the Principal/Headmaster voting at the majority. The decisions of the Personnel subcommittee are not subject to the approval of the School Site Council as a whole to decide this option on their own.

The Personnel Subcommittee is required to meet for all hires made from the BTU and non-BTU pool(s) for the entire school year through the last day of the same school year.

There is a way to involve others on the Personnel Subcommittee who possess expertise in a particular position to be filled. Teacher and parent representatives on the SSC may designate territory replacement representatives on the Personnel Subcommittee according to the positions being filled. These temporary replacements do not need to be members of the SSC. For example, a special education teacher may replace a teacher on the Personnel Subcommittee when a special education position is being filled, only if the elected SSC BTU members or parents choose to do so. The administrator cannot approve any people that they do not want.

It is up to the BTU elected SSC members to caucus on their own to elect the two that will be the BTU Personnel Subcommittee members. It is prudent to also elect an alternate in case one of the two selected is unable to participate on a particular day/time. BTU members are not obligated to select candidates that possess the specific expertise that is a BTU member to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee. It is entirely possible that a teacher from the BTU SSC can be chosen as a whole to decide this option on their own. They cannot be compelled to do so by the administration. The same is true of the parent members. SSC parents select their own parent members to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee as their representative by caucusing on their own to do so. On the high school level, the two principal/Headmaster and the two SSC student members also select which one of them will serve as a member of the Personnel Subcommittee.

The BTU SSC members shall select the BTU representatives to serve on any screening committee convened to make recommendations for the personnel appointments to administrative positions within the school consistent with screening committee guidelines and policies distributed by the school department. Please see Superintendent’s Circular, “SSC Personnel Subcommittee”, FAM-04 for details.

Do I get time off to go to court?

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The contract reads, “Teachers may be considered for transfer in any subject area in which they recently held under the 1993 Massachusetts Educational Reform Act, even if they do not hold an active Boston Program Area; however, a school’s Personnel Subcommittee shall not be required to select any such individual.”

Often, if a teacher applies to transfer in an area that they do not hold a BPS APA, HR will not forward the info to the school for consideration. Why do we have to jump through these hoops if we have already certified the license, isn’t that redundant? In my opinion, it is.

This process is a holdover from long ago and far away, when Mass. teachers were issued ‘licenses for life’. A teacher could be certified in an area they hadn’t taught in or taken course work for in decades, and still be eligible to transfer into that subject area. This APA process was negotiated in order for the BPS to ensure the teacher be ‘current’ in the subject area in question. The BTU attempted to negotiate elimination of this arguably unnecessary requirement. The APA was acceptable to the BPS but the teachers were too much in return for agreeing to do so which would have further limited their transfer options and rights. We couldn’t settle for that!
Commentary  Michael J. Maguire

Cozy Up With the Contract

On Saturday, February 12, 2022 over 100 teachers, paras, and nurses gathered at the BTU for a morning workshop on developing an understanding of the specific measures we are fighting for and the steps we need to take to win a new contract. Tangentially, the conference also focused on how to instill members to come together as we fight for what our members and students need; as well as to build a sense of community so that we can reduce the feelings of burnout.

While the morning welcome was underway, a small but very vocal group of BTU members carrying signs and loudly chanting entered the hall and interrupted the meeting. They expressed their disagreement regarding the new Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Boston and the BTU regarding the status of non-vaccinated BTU members. (see sidebar)

BTU VP Erik Berg negotiated a resolution to the disruption. Three BTU members from the group of protesters were allowed to address the conference for five minutes. After they had their say, they left the hall and the work of the day continued with three workshops and wrapped up with a panel discussion.

Pulling back the curtain: your role in a transparent contract campaign

The BTU has revamped its contract negotiations to fit our vision of a democratic, social justice union which fights for our members and for our community. We heard from our Silent Reps on where negotiations stand and what all of us can do to help move things forward.

Building Rep Basics

We heard from our building reps about what is needed in order to be a strong and effective building rep in our schools, including the challenges and rewards. Dates and Deadlines were stressed so that everyone is prepared and up to date on expectations.

Fighting to Save Our Schools!

Our school buildings are not cozy. Enrollment continues to drop. The state’s racist accountability system threatens receivership. The prospect of more school closures is imminent. The discussion focused on how to organize with fellow educators, students, families, and the community to improve our buildings.

The second phase of the conference was Our Vision For An Anti-Racist Union, Part 2. Following up from the Fall Conference’s Part I, Part 2 examined the BTU’s history by reflecting on stories of the past and present. We had a multi-generational family panel discussion with former and current BTU members. Participants had the opportunity to engage in a discussion with the panelists, who were: Clifford Weeks - one of the first black educators in South Boston. Mr. Weeks worked as a substitute at Campbell (now the Martin Luther King School) then was a music teacher at the Patrick Gavin Junior High and then monitored how BPS was enforcing de segregation and became an Executive Director to Superintendent Thomas Payrunt.

Michelle Davis - taught at the Warren Prescott for 17 years. Ms. Davis then became an Assistant Principal and is now a principal at the Warren Prescott.

Randi Davis - currently a social worker at Madison Park. Ms. Davis previously worked at the Gardner with City Connects and in an administrative role at the Kenny School.

The toplines of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) are summarized here:

BTU educators who are currently unverified for vaccination will not be terminated if they do not comply with the December 20, 2021 policy. Instead, when certain BPHC metrics are met during a surge “Red Zone,” they would be temporarily placed on unpaid leave. This helps us to retain the 116 teachers, 133 paraprofessionals/ABAs and 118 Substitute teachers (out of 8,403 total BTU members) who are currently unverified and at risk of termination under the current policy.

While on unpaid leave, BTU members would be able to access some of their accrued days of paid time off and continue to have their health care with the employer portion covered. While in the “Yellow Zone,” un-verified educators would have to test twice a week using either PCR or rapid antigen tests.

During a “Green Zone,” there would be no difference in the mitigation policies between vaccinated and unverified members.

Those who have retired or resigned due to this policy would be able to be rehired and return to their positions if they choose to do so before March 15.

Jessica Tang, BTU president, wants to share the following message: “It was incredibly unfortunate that a small group of protesters tried to disrupt our event, but it was a testament to the solidarity, strength and resilience of those in attendance that we were able to carry on and continue with the agenda. No one should ever have to feel unsafe in the union hall, and we condemn the actions of those that harassed, assaulted, verbally abused and spewed hatred and racist rhetoric to our educators. While we welcome democracy and peaceful protest, hateful and unsafe actions will not be tolerated. We will be taking further steps to ensure the safety of our members in our building moving forward.”

All new hires would need to comply with the December vaccination policy. No one will go on unpaid leave so long as the court stay is in effect. Full MOA can be read at bit.ly/BTUMOA2022.
place in our union hall and amongst our membership. Those who came to our conference in the spirit of "fighting burnout, prioritizing educator well-being, and ramping up the contract campaign" should not have had to leave the conference early, or in tears, traumatized or deeply harmed. Staff and E-board members should not have had to intervene and literally put their bodies on the line. It is not dissent or disagreement that is the problem, it is the way in which some of the protesters clearly perpetuated racist bullying tactics with the aim to threaten and disrupt our convening. It is also problematic that some of our own members were complicit and did not stop the behaviors of those they had aligned themselves with. Our hall became very unsafe that day, and it continues to feel like an unsafe place for many.

After the conference I shared a follow-up statement in a communication to participants: "It was incredibly unfortunate that a small group of protesters tried to disrupt our event, but it was a testament to the solidarity, strength and resilience of those in attendance that we were able to carry on and continue with the agenda. No one should ever have to feel unsafe in the union hall, and we condemn the actions of those that harassed, assaulted, verbally abused and spewed hatred and racist rhetoric to our educators. While we welcome democracy and peaceful protest, hateful and unsafe actions will not be tolerated. We will be taking further steps to ensure the safety of our members in our building moving forward." It was a message I should have shared with the whole membership via the e-bulletin following the conference.

Despite the trauma and ugliness of the day, there were also bright spots and silver linings. Many members took it upon themselves to share supportive messages in the days following our staff and Executive Board took time to process, reflect and recommend action steps moving forward and many of those members were the ones who stepped up that day and stood up to the protesters to ensure that the day could continue. Conference participants, when given the choice to leave or stay, chose to stay and were determined to continue with the day's program. Our commitment to what we were there to do was tested, but we collectively prevailed.

We will continue to assess the situation and take all possible legal, internal and external steps needed to ensure such a disruption does not take place again as we continue to resume in person gatherings and events at the BTU office. Hopefully, they will not come back. The protesters chanting my name were demanding to meet with me and demanded to know where I was. I and other officers have always met with members who have asked to meet and if an audience or meeting was what they actually wanted, they just had to ask the way any other member does. Unfortunately, I don't think that was actually the goal. Instead, the goal appears to have been to threaten and intimidate. It is doubtful that a productive conversation could have been held under those circumstances.

After the incident, I was advised by many not to share what happened, not give the protesters "air." That we shouldn't talk about it because some of the BTU protesters were BTU members, too. I understand that perspective, but, ultimately, I believe that to be silent and not speak about it would be to try to sweep under the rug an ugly moment that not only harmed many of our members, but that is also an important teachable moment. Our union is not immune from hateful rhetoric, misinformation and harmful acts against each other. We are still a reflection of larger society, which was built on a foundation of white supremacy, addressing racism, and navigating the reality that democracy within our union doesn't always mean consensus or that everyone agrees, there is much we still have to learn together as a union. It is not easy work, particularly during a pandemic, previous presidency where bullying became normalized and back to back school years that have heightened stress, anxiety and emotions. But it is the work we must continue to do as we think about not just what an anti-racist union must be, but a trauma sensitive one as well.

One of our strategic goals this year is about changing organizational culture: creating more joy, appreciation, connectedness and positivity within our union. This may feel overwhelming on the organizational level, but at the end of the day, the change begins with individual interactions, one on one. It begins with each one of us trying to be better and looking out for one another, even if we don’t always agree. Ultimately, that is the whole point of a union—not letting others divide us, but finding the common ground that makes us all stronger. It begins with small acts of kindness and that, to me, was one of the greatest lessons of the day. It was the kindness and courage of others on a day that so many felt very vulnerable that I will ultimately choose to remember the most.

The protesters advertised that they were there because we had negotiated an agreement that would terminate teachers jobs due to the vaccine mandate. However, the MOA actually specifically prevents anyone who is unvaccinated from getting terminated because of their vaccination status. There have also been accusations that we held a vote incorrectly, that I didn't know what was in the agreement before it was brought to the membership meeting, that we negotiated a "backroom deal" with the mayor or made promises to the mayor without telling the membership. All of these are examples of inaccurate misinformation.

During the Executive Board meeting following the Winter Conference, we spent a significant amount of time reflecting and processing the events that occurred. Several of the Black board members who faced the most reprehensible attacks, when asked to share thoughts, said that they were okay because they were "used to it". And that they faced such comments and attacks even in their own schools throughout the years. Not all of the protesters were white either. That is how pervasive racism and prejudice can be. Sometimes it is internalized, and sometimes people of color can still be prejudiced towards other people of color. Acknowledging and facing the unflattering parts of our history, actions, and inaction has to be a part of the learning we are a part of if we are truly to be an anti-racist union. It should also be noted that these events happened during Black History Month. One of the panels of the conference was three generations of current and former black BTU members— all from one family—reflecting on the past, present and future. They reflected on what has changed and what has not, and where we need to go as a union when it comes to our anti-racism work. The irony that this panel was postponed and almost canceled due to the disruption, a disruption that some of the perpetrators were claiming to be for people of color, is not missed. The irony that black members standing up for others were then accused by some of the protesters of segregating against them all the while co-opting civil rights language also does not go unnoticed.

When it comes to promoting civil discourse within our union, undoing white supremacy, addressing racism, and navigating the reality that democracy within our union doesn't always mean consensus or that everyone agrees, there is much we still have to learn together as a union. It is not easy work, particularly during a pandemic, previous presidency where bullying became normalized and back to back school years that have heightened...
Submitted by Tracey Billy, Librarian at the Mather School
Happy Women’s History Month! My mom’s birthday is March 8th and so is International Women’s Day! When I was growing up my mom always made sure we knew she was born on Women’s Day and that in Cabo Verde, where she was born this was celebrated. These two stories can create a powerful lesson about history and current civics, while inspiring our students to be their very best no matter what! I can also see adding in Stacy Abrams Stacy’s Extraordinary Words to poems and use your voice for change!

“Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn’t be that women are the exception.” – Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Amanda Gorman’s story with my students. Growing up I also had a speech impediment, my mother loved to tell me I did not fully talk until I was eight and have more than made up for the missed years! Her story inspires all to know we can overcome anything! Then of course, read Kamala Harris: “We have hope. Our students see themselves reflected in the classrooms! Please sign up for read alouds with me! Meeting your students is the best part of my job! I will leave you all with this quote in honor of the great Andre Lorde: “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am a woman.”

Happy Women’s History Month and congrats on another month of helping to encourage our future leaders, may they always be powerful!

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The Boston Globe Salutes BPS Retired Teacher Edith Bazile During Black History Month for Making a Difference

On February 19, 2022, The Boston Globe ran the following story by Naomi Martin honoring BTU retired teacher Edith Bazile. Here is what The Boston Globe wrote:

Edith Bazile is long retired from Boston Public Schools, but she still spends her time there, challenging leaders to offer better educational opportunities to Black and Latino students and those with disabilities.

BY THE BOSTON GLOBE

Edith Bazile’s mission stems from her lifelong love of BTU members. To apply, please obtain an application from Adrienne Washington at awashington@btu.org or download the application from the BTU website at btu.org and return with: 1) a transcript of the applicant’s last two years of academic work; 2) evidence of acceptance by an accredited college, junior college, vocational school or equivalent institution; 3) member’s notarized federal tax return for the year 2021; 4) a one-page statement of the dependent’s goals. Application and the four supporting documents must be received in the Union office no later than April 25, 2023.

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 are children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces or grandnephews of RTC members. One of these scholarships is earmarked for a student who chooses to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution.

Applications for these scholarships can be downloaded from the BTU website at btu.org or obtained from Adrienne Washington at awashington@btu.org. The deadline to apply is April 16, 2023. Envelope must be postmarked by this date.

The application and the supporting documents must be received in the Union office no later than April 25, 2023; 4) a one-page statement of the dependent’s goals.

Membership is required for a student who chooses to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution.

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Thank you to our friends at Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts for including us in their Cookies For A Cause initiative!

After receiving this generous donation of thousands of cookies, we were able to Share The Love with our awesome educators.

We felt the love when you stopped by on Valentine’s Day, and for that we are grateful!

Jinny Chalmers Fund
Grant Proposals Welcome
The Jinny Chalmers Fund for Education Justice is seeking funding proposals for projects aimed at furthering excellent, inclusive education and racial justice for children and families in Greater Boston.

Applications will be considered during three funding cycles in 2022: April, July and October.

Visit www.jinnychalmersfund.org to:
• Read the Fund’s Inaugural Report and learn about 2021 grantees
• Download the 2022 Grant Application
• Learn more about Jinny Chalmers and the Chalmers Fund

Retired Teachers Chapter
Sandra Carle, Lawrence J. Connolly & Janey Frank, RTC Legislative Committee

Attention Active and Future Retirees – YOUR PUBLIC PENSION!

Whether you are currently retired, you plan to retire, or thirty years from retirement, your public pension holds great power over how you live the last thirty or forty years of your life.

Be assured that the RTC Legislative Committee has been working hard for over a decade to advocate for a fair Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) on your behalf. This year we have written to the mayor, all thirteen city councilors, and all members of the Boston Retirement Board asking them to support raising the COLA base to $18,000. We are asking you to do likewise. Every one of us is feeling the impact of the largest jump in inflation in 38 years, facing astronomical price increases in food, gas, housing, health care and medications, and so much more. Think of how this affects you as a retiree, or how it may affect you in the future. One stark change, for instance, changes in the City health insurance for retirees raised drug copays up to 150% in some cases!! Your elected officials need to hear your personal stories.

We are asking you to do this for a lack of financial ability or pension fund returns that the base is not at least $18,000, but for a lack of commitment by previous administrations. Investment returns at the Board, tax revenues for the City, and an unbelievable infusion of COVID funding by both the Trump and Biden administrations have left them at a loss of how to spend the influx. In 2020, the assets in the State fund grew by almost $10 billion and only $1.5 billion was needed to pay all its pension benefits. Where is the fiduciary responsibility when we see no benefit from the return on our assets?

Also, in 2020, the Retirement Board moved the full funding data from FY2025 to FY2027 in a proactive, but unnecessary move to protect the City treasury; as a result of COVID. Why don’t we use funds from that two-year move to cover the increased base with no adverse impact to the City or Board? Let the writing begin!

Contact the mayor and councilors at: City of Boston, 1 City Hall Square, Suite 550, Boston, MA 02201-2043 or visit https://www.boston.gov/departments/ city-council for their E-mail addresses and phone numbers.

Contact the Boston Retirement System at Timothy J. Smith, Esquire, Executive Officer, Boston Retirement System, City Hall, Room 816, Boston, MA 02201 or visit https://www.boston.gov/departments/retirement for their E-mail addresses.

The RTC office is open on Wednesday and Thursday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Sumner School Celebrates Black History Month

Photos by Adrianne Jordan