

# Boston Teachers Union Election 2021



Please mail your ballots by June 1.  
In-person voting @ BTU June 2  
(8 AM-6 PM)

**BOSTON TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 66, AFT**  
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# Boston Union Teacher



The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union, AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

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## President's Report Jessica J. Tang

# Building BTU Power Through Policy, Legislation and Political Progress

Throughout this school year and throughout the pandemic, we have continued to build BTU power through multiple means. We have strengthened internal organizing through the creation of Contract Action Teams at dozens of our schools with the support of BTU member organizers and coaches. We have continued to support our BTU organizing committees, such as Ethnic Studies Now, Inclusion Done Right and, our most recently created Housing Justice committee. We have had the most participation ever in our contract survey, with over 3,000 members having shared their priorities as we enter new master contract negotiations.

On the community front, we have consistently partnered with dozens of coalitions and organizations ranging from education focused groups such as the Boston Education Justice Alliance, MA Education Justice Alliance to civil rights groups including the NAACP, API's CAN and Lawyers for Civil Rights. Our coalition participation work spans from housing justice work to climate justice and, of course, labor councils and labor affiliated groups. We recently held forums for families, students and the larger community to hear from stakeholders and engage them in our upcoming contract work as well.

Our focus in April, May and much of this year, will continue to be on the political and legislative front. Our Political Director, Political Organizers and COPE committee has been busy preparing and reviewing questionnaires, interviewing candidates and organizing events for member engagement in our electoral work. In May alone, we are hosting three candidates forums: one for the Boston mayoral race, one for at-large city council candidates, and a third for the candidates in the district 4 city council race where two BTU members are running.

Throughout the spring we have been attending City Council hearings, budget hearings and have been in close communication with City Councilors and Mayor **Kim Janey**. Many of these hearings pertained to the pandemic school year

and we will be a part of the Superintendent's Recovery Commission, created in response to the call for more transparency on how pandemic funds are being and will be used. I was also honored to co-chair Mayor Janey's Education Transition Team with NAACP President **Tanisha Sullivan** and submit recommendations for the next few months. Most recently we joined our RTC members to advocate for an increase in the COLA base and were able to get a commitment from the new mayor to recommend an increase of \$1,000.

We have also been busy meeting with members of the Boston delegation to share our legislative priorities including full funding of the Student Opportunities Act and support for our home rule petition to address the Retirement Plus issue impacting hundreds of BTU members who are ready to retire. We are reviewing dozens more pieces of legislation that may be added to our agenda as well, and are organizing around taking power back from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education already approved by the Executive Board as we begin to finalize our legislative agenda for the year.

In addition to our filing of an amendment to fully fund the Student Opportunity Act based on pre-pandemic enrollment and advocacy for full funding over the next six years as originally passed, we will be supporting state efforts to pass the Fair Share Amendment to tax individuals who make over \$1 million. At the AFT-MA Convention, two resolutions related to addressing climate change were passed, which include support of the Green New Deal as well as Massachusetts Senate Bill 9, An Act Creating a Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy. Locally, we will be advocating for a Green New Deal for Green New Schools to improve the facilities, efficiency and environmental climate of our schools.

As part of the AFL-CIO, we are also supporting the following legislative priorities:

- Essential Workers Bill of Rights:

sick time, hazard pay, occupational presumption, childcare relief, drivers licenses, etc.

- Safety nets and Jobs for struggling workers: Progressive revenues to invest in the public good and stop layoffs, Right to Recall, strengthen and defend UI, save film production and live theater jobs, etc.
- Protecting public transportation: As part of the Public Transit Public Good Coalition, advocating for progressive revenue investments into public transportation (the same 3 measures we have been advocating for with RUM, just in the context of public transportation), to ensure that we don't cut transportation that essential workers need and that unemployed people need to have access to jobs; ensuring workers have a voice in MBTA decision making; and fighting back attempts to privatize.
- Investing in public education by funding the Student Opportunity Act to inject direly needed funds into most under-resourced schools, and stopping the layoffs that have been sweeping Higher Ed.
- Ensuring Community standards: Wage theft, closing the prevailing wage loophole on offsite prefab.
- Gearing up for a battle over employee classification, based on ads we're seeing from Uber. Uber and Lyft spent over \$200 million to pass Prop 22 in CA to undermine decades of progress on core workers' rights and gut protections essential workers need now more than ever. The employee classification law that they weakened in CA is based on the worker classification law that we have here, and we've already seen ads from Uber here saying its time for MA to do what CA did. We're not about to let gig companies carve themselves out of labor laws and expedite the gig economy creeping into more and more sectors, so please stay tuned as this potential fight unfolds. In this vein, as we gear



**Jessica J. Tang**  
BTU President

up for a defensive fight against Uber/Lyft, we are also working on refiling a similar version of the bill we filed last session to give gig "TNC" drivers the right to organize into unions.

On the national front, AFT President **Randi Weingarten** is leading the fight for national legislation and policy to strengthen worker organizing and empowerment. This includes the critical funding passed by the Biden administration for pandemic funding, as well as the more recent America Recovery Act. The AFT is also advocating for the important Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act). Our MA Senators and Congress members have continued to be incredible allies in these efforts. (Please see the companion piece by President Weingarten on page 2.)

We have much work to do, but as always, our political power is dependent on the activism and involvement of our members. We hope you will take some time to get involved in helping us to grow our influence at City Hall, the State House and beyond. Every action matters — attending a whether it's signing a petition, calling or emailing your legislators, attending a candidate forum, meeting with your legislators, taking just an hour time to phone bank for a BTU endorsed candidate or help with door knocking — it all matters. Ready to get involved?! We would love to hear from you! Join our BTU Electoral Action Team by contacting **Roberto Jimenez** at [rjimenez@btu.org](mailto:rjimenez@btu.org).

Thank you to everyone for your continued perseverance and commitment during this difficult year. We look forward to seeing more of you in person soon and in the meantime, urge everyone to remain vigilant and safe.



# CAT: Building Structures to Give Our Union Claws

By **Caitlin Gaffny (Tobin K-8, Executive Board), Cecil Carey (Charlestown High), Chelsea Ruscio (Channing), Ari Branz (organizer), and Natalia Cuadra-Saez (organizer)**

## Contract Action Team Context

**N**aomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine*, has taught us that “in moments of crisis, people are willing to hand over a great deal of power to anyone who claims to have a magic cure.” But she has also taught us that another response is possible: “We do not always respond to shocks with

regression. Sometimes, in the face of crisis, we grow up — fast.”

If we’ve learned anything over this past year of struggle with school reopening, it’s that we need to be united as a union and be ready to stand together in solidarity to fight for what’s right for students and educators. Over the last few months, we’ve grown up — fast — into a deeper model of organizing: CATs, or Contract Action Teams. The idea to bring CATs to the BTU began at our June membership meeting when a resolution written and brought to the floor by **Jonathan Haines** and other rank-and-file members proposed “That the BTU imme-

diately prioritize its internal organizing efforts towards establishing an action network similar to the Contract Action Committees in CTU [Chicago Teachers Union] and the Contract Action Teams in UTLA [United Teachers Los Angeles].”

## Role and Function

**C**ATs are an invaluable structure that enable increased member involvement at the school level. This is one way our union grows more nimble and more inclusive of member voice as a way to build our collective power.

Each school-based CAT is headed by a

CAT leader, who recruits CAT Members to form a small group that has the ability to quickly and effectively reach the rest of the school’s staff. Often, CATs will map out their schools to ensure they can reach every member and then begin to have conversations to uncover school-based challenges and issues. CATs meet regularly to support Building Reps in union work, such as inviting members to Faculty Senate, encouraging participation in school-based work actions, or mobilizing members to union-wide actions.

CATs are a tool for BTU members to communicate and disseminate information quickly by establishing connections between colleagues at the school level, but they are much more than a phone tree. They are a way of building solidarity at the school-level and of enhancing rank-and-file member voice. It’s a way to make a union what it should be: workers who have each other’s backs.

CATs strengthen a school community’s two-way communication, provide extra support for building reps in carrying out BTU actions and initiatives, build solidarity to help schools fight to do what’s right for students, families, and educators, and find solutions for school-level issues.

CATs improve the immediacy, frequency, and personal follow up on union communications and actions. This does not absolve nor impede the building reps’ responsibilities and role, but enhances the timeliness and effectiveness of total open communication, sense of member connection, and unity.

CATs alleviate some of the individualism building reps can feel when trying to make union business a priority with large num-

bers of staff. When members are hearing from colleagues beyond the reps, it messages that this work is a priority to multiple people in the building.

## At the school level

**W**hen the call to be a part of CAT went out to educators at the Tobin School, a large number immediately stepped up and wanted to help lead the work. In talking to folks, it became clear that there was a desire to be more actively involved and excitement to contribute in a new way. While second jobs and familial responsibilities can impede some members’ ability to join after-school committees and attend in person meetings, CAT opened up a door.

First, our building reps and CAT met to talk about the purpose and vision for the work. Then, we divided our staff list in a way that made the most sense for ease and speed of communications. CAT leader **MaryAlice Sandy** matched one CAT member to each floor for our middle and elementary, specialist team, SEI team, ABA team, special education team, and our itinerants. In order to enable more intimate outreach, each CAT group does not exceed eight. Next, each CAT member reached out to their assigned crew and collected a personal email and phone number so we could update our outreach list. This step was crucial in ensuring that our dissemination was complete and that each member in the school was receiving the same messaging.

We have activated our CAT structure a number of times this year. It has served to reinforce union communications, share information in an expedient manner, remind members to commit to actions, and when utilized as a two-way flow has brought feedback to the building reps that otherwise would have taken a more circuitous route. CAT has empowered Tobin members to shift from peripheral involvement to being central to the union work happening at our school. It is enthralling to think about the possibility for growth going forward. We have Tobin members working with the BTU’s committees on Ethnic Studies, BLM in Schools, COPE, and more. The hope is that we will be able to evolve, increasing our prowess at sharing all of the great work happening in various committees and spaces beyond our monthly Faculty Senate. We want CAT to serve as an internal information superhighway for any member looking to bring knowledge to peers as well as hone our mobilization capabilities to be ready to act when called upon.

## How to build a CAT at your school

**T**he full potential of CATs will only be realized when we have active CATs at every school site in our union. Hopefully, we’ve convinced you that CAT is something you want to start or get involved in at your school! Reach out to your BTU CAT Coach and ask for support in establishing a team at your school. If you aren’t sure who this member is, ask our organizers! Our union provides training on setting up CATs, with clear next steps and resources you can take back to your schools.

Think about how you want to organize

*continued on page 6*

### WHAT MATTERS MOST

## Creating the freedom to thrive

**Randi Weingarten, President American Federation of Teachers**

America’s once-thriving middle class did not appear out of thin air. Federal economic policy helped seed it: New Deal programs, the GI Bill and the National Labor Relations Act’s enabling of union organizing all created conditions for shared prosperity and upward mobility—not for all Americans, to be sure, but for many. Today, the American economy has been described as an hourglass, with extreme wealth at the top, tens of millions of people struggling at the bottom and an ever-narrowing middle class. Our country built a robust middle class once before, and we can do so again.

The clearest line tracking the inversion from upward to downward mobility in the United States is this: As the percentage of workers in unions plummeted, inequality soared.

Many forces have conspired to erode union density—starting 50 years ago with a memo by Lewis Powell, a future U.S. Supreme Court justice. Powell crafted the blueprint for corporate political and economic dominance, which many in corporate America followed to the letter. From the breaking of the air traffic controllers’ union in the 80s to Amazon’s relentless campaign to defeat the recent union drive in Alabama, powerful forces have crushed workers’ power. Today, Americans are twice as likely to have a Costco card as they are to have a union card.

Research by the Economic Policy Institute shows that the erosion of collective bargaining lowered the median hourly wage by 7.9 percent from 1979 to 2017. Millennials generally have lower earnings and wealth, and more student debt, than earlier generations. Working people are now losing about \$200 billion per year because of declining union coverage over the last four decades—with that money redistributed upward, to the rich.

Yet, even with much-reduced union density—34.8 percent of public sector workers, and only 6.3 percent of private sector workers, belong to unions—the union advantage is still plain to see. Union members have greater access to health insurance and paid sick days, and they are paid 11.2 percent more than their nonunion counterparts. The edge in wages is even greater for Black

and Hispanic workers represented by a union (13.7 percent more and 20.1 percent more, respectively). Women in unions earn 30 percent more than nonunion women.

Public support for unions is the highest in nearly two decades, and nearly half of nonunionized workers would join a union if given the opportunity. Why don’t American workers have more opportunities to join a union? Because many employers want to keep the balance of power in their favor and have used that power to fight union organizing drives and hack away at the worker protections in U.S. labor laws.

### Our country built a robust middle class before, and we can do so again.

That is why the Protecting the Right to Organize Act is so important. Under the PRO Act, employers would no longer be able to retaliate against or fire workers who support union drives, or to engage in endless delays to prevent newly formed unions from reaching their first contract.

Working families need help from the officials we elect to represent us. Decades of anti-government propaganda have stoked Americans’ distrust. But President Joe Biden is changing that, launching ambitious programs that provide solutions and support, and proudly declaring: “Help is here.”

Biden’s core economic strategy is threefold: rescue, jobs and families. The recently passed American Rescue Plan is

a lifeline for millions of Americans and for the country itself. Earlier this year, the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey found that nearly 81 million adults (35 percent) reported it was difficult to cover usual expenses. That figure rises to 41 percent for adults living with children. Some 22 million adults (11 percent) said their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat, rising to 14 percent in households with children.

The American Rescue Plan will cut child poverty in half, extend aid to the unemployed, increase food benefits, help families pay their bills and keep a roof over their heads, and help states and local communities maintain schools and protect the jobs of people who provide essential services. The plan shows the power of government to be a force for good and to pave the way for a more equitable recovery. Polling shows that Americans—including Republicans—overwhelmingly support the legislation.

Now Congress must pass the American Jobs Plan, which will put millions of Americans to work in well-paying jobs and invest not only in traditional infrastructure, like roads and bridges, but also in clean water, high-speed broadband and infrastructure resilience from the effects of climate change. And Biden’s American Families Plan is expected to center on child care, universal prekindergarten and paid leave to care for family members.

Every person in America deserves the freedom to thrive. That requires family-supporting jobs, rights at work, educational opportunities, a voice in our democracy and pathways to get ahead. A vibrant middle class must not be a thing of the past. This robust economic agenda will help rebuild it for the future.



Weingarten, foreground, volunteering with members of the United Federation of Teachers at a Bronx food bank, June 2, 2020.

Photo: Susan Perez

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# What kind of vote do we take to change the school's class schedule for next year?

The contract reads; 'Whatever master schedule (e.g., six period day, seven period day, block schedule) is in effect in a middle or high school... shall remain in effect in subsequent years unless a new type of schedule is approved through the waiver provisions under school-based management by a vote of 55% of the BTU staff.'

If there will be a change in 'work conditions' – such as exceeding the maximum teaching time at the secondary level of 240 minutes per day, requiring teachers to teach more than 160 minutes in a row without a lunch break, planning and development period, or an administrative duty, or not providing a minimum of 240 minutes of planning and development time each week (in a "traditional school"); then the waiver process under School Site Council needs to be followed. The BTU allows portions of the standard contract to be waived utilizing this very specific process. Waiving (giving up or modifying) hard fought collective bargaining rights should not be entered into lightly or in an uninformed manner.

Briefly put, in order to waive work conditions as stated above; the School Site Council must approve the waiver, the Principal must approve the waiver, at least **66-2/3rds** of the members of the eligible BTU members affected who are present and voting must approve the waiver; such a vote to be conducted by the Union Representatives using a secret ballot after five (5) days' notice to all those eligible to vote. If and when such a waiver vote is taken and passes all of the steps, 'The Steering Committee shall be notified in writing of all waivers within five (5) days of their adoption.' Please notify the BTU Field Representatives in writing of a successful waiver vote as well.

The contract also provides, "If a teacher at a school waiving a provision of this contract as described [in the contract in detail] objects to the impact of that waiver on his or her job responsibilities, he or she shall be afforded an opportunity to transfer to another position in the system without loss of seniority or benefits. The implementation of any such waiver shall be delayed until such transfer opportunity has been provided or the impact of the waiver on this teacher has been eliminated. Any dispute arising out of the provisions of this paragraph shall be referred to the Steering Committee for resolution and shall not be arbitrable, provided that the Steering Committee reaches a decision on the matter within 30 days." The Steering Committee is a joint labor-management team co-chaired by the BTU President and the BPS Superintendent, composed

of an equal number of BTU and Management selected members.

## Who determines the content of and when the 18 hours of mandated teacher unit professional development are scheduled?

The 18 hours of professional development beyond the regular school day hours must be scheduled each year. The content of the professional development is determined by the school administration to reflect each individual school's Whole School Improvement Plan. However, the configuration of how the hours is to be scheduled is to be done with a secret ballot vote with five days' notice of the faculty conducted by the BTU Representatives. The schedule is determined by a majority vote of the faculty and the approval of the administrator. The vote can be done by subject area, grade level, or other groupings of educational interest.

The contract states, 'If the administrator and faculty fail to agree on a professional development schedule, three six-hour professional development days shall be added to the end of the school year. Teachers shall be required to participate in 18 hours of professional development plus one full day of professional development on the work day following the Christmas vacation or the April vacation, at the discretion of management. This full day of professional development may be converted to professional development hours by a majority vote of the faculty.'

'The professional development schedule for a school year shall be finalized before the end of the previous school year and the schedule shall be distributed to the staff. In the event that more than 25% of the staff is new to the building the following September, the faculty may re-vote.' [Vote to be conducted by secret ballot with 5 days' notice to the faculty by the BTU Reps. which must be completed by 9/15].

When an 18-hour professional development activity is scheduled after regular school hours to take place for 2 hours or less, if a person is out sick or has a personal day, they do not have to make that time up. However, if the professional development activity is scheduled for more than a 2-hour block, the time does have to be made up by the faculty member or they are subject to loss of wages for that time. Paraprofessionals vote on the professional development hours only if such a vote entails the conversion of or breaking up of an entire day into hours.

## What is the BTU contract language about LATF (Language Acquisition Team Facilitators)?

The contract language reads: "The Language Acquisition Team Facilitator (LATF) at all schools at the elementary level shall be granted an extracurricular payment of \$300 per every 25 English Learners at their school to complete Language Assessment related duties. This will

be the amount for school year 19-20 FY 20 and be eligible for annual wage increases thereafter.

At the middle and high school levels, the LATF shall be allowed two (2) administrative periods to perform these duties."

## Do itinerant service providers receive testing kits or a budget for supplies?

Contract language states: "The School Department will provide the testing kits and other protocols to all itinerant service providers. In addition, the BPS will budget \$200 per itinerant service provider for supplies related to their discipline. Itinerants will be surveyed by their supervisor for input in developing a departmental catalogue of approved supplies. Itinerant service providers, upon request, will receive \$200 per year in materials from this disciplinary catalogue."

## What's the contract language about Professional Development for Related Service Providers?

The contract language reads: "A separate yearly budget will be allocated for the related service provider disciplines (including but not limited to, occupational, physical and speech and language therapies, vision services, psychology, adapted physical education, Guidance Counselors, Student Support Coordinators, and nurses), for planning and implementation of relevant professional development to satisfy contractual professional development requirements. The BTU and administrative members of the joint union management committee will plan the allocation of these funds for discipline specific professional development. The BTU will provide space for the meetings to be held when available."



**Caren Carew**  
BTU Secondary  
Field Representative

## Do I get time off to go to court?

The contract states; "The Boston School Department will provide release time without loss of pay for court appearances on school business, including cases involving job-related teacher assaults."

If you are being brought to court by or are bringing a student to court, you get release time. If you have jury duty, you must give a copy of the jury duty letter to your school's secretary. Once you have successfully completed the jury duty service, give a copy of the certificate/letter you receive from the court indicating the same. You will then have that time properly coded by the school secretary so it will not be deducted from your sick/personal days. Make sure you carefully scrutinize your pay stub to determine if that has occurred.

If you are subpoenaed to court by someone non-related to school business, or if you are appearing at court for an appeal of a moving violation, and the like, that is not covered under court leave and will be deducted from your sick/personal days.

## How may bereavement days are teachers entitled to?

"In the event of a death in the immediate family, including mother-in-law, father-in-law or anyone residing in the same household with the teacher, up to five (5) days without loss of pay shall be provided. Days are consecutive school

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**BTU Phone Numbers**

Office.....617-288-2000  
 Health & Welfare.....617-288-0500  
 AFT Massachusetts.....617-423-3342  
 Function Office.....617-288-3322  
 Lounge Office.....617-288-3322  
 Vision Center.....617-288-5540  
 Tremont Credit Union.....781-843-5626

## Boston Union Teacher

Boston Teachers Union, AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

**EDITORIAL NOTE:**  
The opinions expressed in the *Boston Union Teacher* do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or those of its members.

**WHEN WRITING:**  
All correspondence to the *Boston Union Teacher* must be typewritten and include the author's name and school or department if not school-based. All articles must be appropriate to the publication, and in good taste. Letters to the Editor should be sent to [letters@btu.org](mailto:letters@btu.org)

**DEADLINE:**  
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is June 9th. All copy should be e-mailed to [mmaguire@btu.org](mailto:mmaguire@btu.org) and [gvirchick@btu.org](mailto:gvirchick@btu.org). This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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# Fix Boston's McKinley Schools: Rename Them "Melvin H. King Schools" and Reimagine Their Vision and Purpose

by Edith Bazile

On October 23, 1899, a group of prominent Black citizens from Boston wrote a strong letter of protest to President **William McKinley** imploring him to speak out against the escalating incidents of lynching and ongoing acts of vicious racial violence against Black people in the South.

Here's an excerpt: "Are you silent because without any fault of our own we were enslaved and held for more than two centuries in cruel bondage by your forefathers? Is it because we bear the marks of those sad generation of Anglo-Saxon brutality and wickedness, that you do not speak?"

President McKinley did nothing. In fact, he placated the white supremacists and affirmed their citizenry.

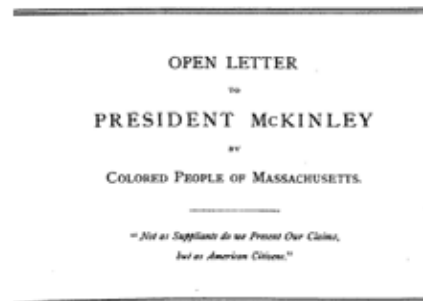
In a stinging open letter, Black citizens of Boston exposed the hypocrisy of President McKinley's claims that America stood for freedom and democracy in foreign countries while he refused to speak, let alone take action, against the murders and other violent abuses whites in the South were using to suppress Black people.

Boston's McKinley Schools are named after this 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. president. That should change.

The McKinley Schools (a group of four schools within BPS) should be renamed in honor of **Melvin H. King**, a BPS graduate and legend known as "The Son of the South End."

## An inspiring Boston leader

**M**el King is the former director of Boston's Urban League, created innovative community-based programs, and founded the South End Technology Center. King's life's mission led him to become a stalwart community leader, organizer, author, educator, and the first



(Images above are from the Library of Congress.)

Black Boston mayoral candidate.

He dedicated his life to urban renewal and sparked protest against gentrification in the South End.

Mel King successfully organized a massive sit-in, known as Tent City, which led to affordable housing for low-income Black residents who were threatened with relocation due to gentrification of their neighborhoods. Mel tirelessly fought for his community and community-based schooling, including the McKinley School at 90 Warren Street, where he mentored youth. Students constructed a huge school mural in honor of Mel King.

Decades later, the McKinley Schools have lost their way in educating Black students. It is now time to reimagine

their name, vision, and purpose in honor of the living legend, Mel King, now in his 90s.

Today, when a white man says, "Give me liberty or give me death," he is considered a hero. When a Black man says, "Black Lives Matter," he is sucked into the vortex of racial hatred and labeled a criminal.

## Black boys more likely to get a "substantially separate" placement

**F**or Black boys, the process of criminalization begins early with harsh disciplinary practices, often leading to segregation in substantially separate special education settings. I argue that the purpose of public education in America has been to maintain the balance of power in society and ensure it does not shift.

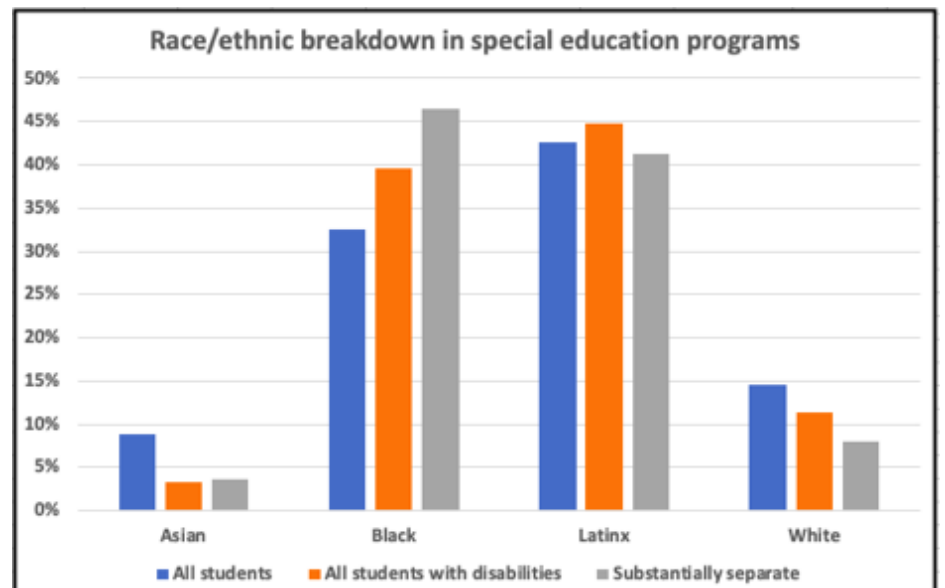
The McKinley Schools were founded in 1978 for a population of students between the ages of five and twenty-two who have reportedly failed in school due to primary emotional and behavioral problems as well as concomitant academic challenges. These students are assigned to McKinley through BPS's special education process.



Edith Bazile

Public schools were designed for white students; the curricular content and teaching methodologies were created to center whiteness. White values are rooted in the curriculum, pedagogy, policies, and practices, and are promoted in school culture, disciplinary procedures, celebrations, and rituals. When schools were integrated, no efforts were made to alter or diminish the impact of a white, colonized curriculum.

Disproportionately harsh disciplinary procedures against Black males in schools are connected to the disproportionate numbers of Black males stopped, detained, brutalized, imprisoned, and



Data from a recent BPS presentation about Advanced Work Classes. The point of the presentation was that AWC and special education programs show opposite racial patterns.

Since the McKinley design did not address the root cause of structural racism as a reason for referral to special education, the IEP process disproportionately targeted Black males, resulting in significant over-representation of Black boys. Once they go in, they don't get out, which makes a McKinley placement a sentence, not a service for Black students. This often leads to higher dropout rates, unemployment, underemployment, or imprisonment.

According to historian **Carter G. Woodson**, "...to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching"

killed by the police. The racialized targeting of Black males is not new, and it begins early in schooling where Black students are more harshly disciplined, suspended, restrained, expelled, over-policed, arrested, and more frequently sent to DYS detention facilities.

## "Adultification" and its roots

**A**ccording to Professor **Michael Dumas** of the University of California, the historical roots of enslavement result in the adultification of Black boys and girls. Adultification occurs when a child is perceived to be many years older than his/her chronological age, often erasing the distinction between child and adult.

*Once they go in, they don't get out, which makes a McKinley placement a sentence, not a service for Black students.*



The mural outside the McKinley Schools at 90 Warren Avenue in the South End. (Photo by David Brigham, used by permission)



**One police officer said, “Stop acting like a child.” The 9-year-old girl tearfully responded, “I am a child.”**

During chattel slavery, Black children as young as three years old were expected to perform work in much the same way as their enslaved parents because Black children were not perceived as innocent. They were denied a childhood and were punished for exhibiting typical childhood behavior.

In January 2021, a 9-year-old Black girl from New Rochelle, N.Y. was dragged through the snow by several white officers, then handcuffed and pepper-sprayed in the face while she cried out for her father. One police officer said, “Stop acting like a child.” The 9-year-old girl tearfully responded, “I am a child,” to which the officer replied, “You did it to yourself, hon.”

On the other hand, **Kyle Rittenhouse**, brandishing an AR-15 type rifle, shot and killed two people, then calmly walked past police, who did not intervene, and went home. News stories portrayed him as a *17-year-old boy* who was afraid and defending himself, even though he killed unarmed men.

But **Tamir Rice**, a *12-year-old child*, was shot dead in two seconds as he played with a toy on the playground. After the killing, the police officer reported on his walkie-talkie, “Shots fired. Male down. Black male, maybe 20.”

The McKinley Schools are disproportionately populated with Black students, specifically boys because they are erroneously viewed as more aggressive, less innocent, dangerous, in less need of nurturing, much older than their chronological age, and emotionally and behaviorally impaired.

### **Justin: Emotional impairment or dyslexia?**

Here’s an example that illustrates the challenge: Justin, eight years old, is a shy student, an excellent soccer player, well behaved, and good at math.

When his third-grade teacher asked him to read aloud in class, Justin threw his book to the floor, kicked it and shouted, “I’d rather die than read.”

As he sprinted out of the classroom, he bumped into his teacher, who tried to block his exit. The teacher summoned the principal, who discovered Justin hiding in the bathroom stall. After coaxing him out of the stall, the principal guided Justin by the arm to the office. Justin instinctively wrestled to get free and sprinted toward the school’s exit, but was caught and restrained by staff.

**Justin threw his book to the floor, kicked it and shouted, “I’d rather die than read.”**

Justin’s parents, who never received a call on disciplinary matters, were told Justin could not return to school until he received medical clearance from a doctor. After returning to school, Justin was repeatedly disciplined and spent much of his time in the principal’s office.

### **Diagnosis rejected, child saved**

Justin’s parents reported that the discipline complaints were unfounded. Justin started experiencing sleep difficulty and began resisting going to school. The school recommended a referral to special education. Although assessments revealed Justin demonstrated difficulties with phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency, the IEP Team determined that Justin had an emotional impairment and recommended a substantially separate special education program for students with primary emotional impairments. In this case, the parents rejected the Team recommendation and enlisted advocacy to get the right services for Justin.

Justin’s story is common for Black boys who require academic support yet don’t get the necessary and early intervening literacy and academic supports. Then they are blamed for not performing, disciplined, and placed in substantially segregated school settings where literacy and academic supports are still not provided.

The cost of a McKinley seat is approximately \$77,000 per student annually, which does not include an extended school year that students are entitled to attend during the summer. The 2020 enrollment is 319 students.

The Black student population significantly exceeds its percentage in the district. According to 2019/2020 DESE data, Black student enrollment in the district was 29.3%; McKinley is comprised of 41.9% Black students. Latinx students are slightly overrepresented; there are 42.4% Latinx students in the district and 43.1% in McKinley schools.

### **What are the results of a \$77,000 seat at a McKinley School?**

A 7:1 student to staff ratio. According to DESE, the four-year graduation rate for Black students is 18.5%; the rate of four-year graduation for Latinx students is 20%. Despite the requirement of transition planning, 74.3% of the McKinley students responded that their aspirations for post-high school were “unknown.” No McKinley graduates enrolled in a four-year college. McKinley students are more likely to be suspended in school and incarcerated in DYS facilities.

### **Left out of BuildBPS**

The McKinley Preparatory High School has been left out of high school redesign; it has no library, no gym, no cafeteria, and no labs. The classrooms are small, therapy spaces are inadequate and dreary, and bathrooms

**“McKinley is at the intersection of a number of our failures.” — Nate Kuder**

*Edith Bazile and BPS Chief Financial Officer Nate Kuder had a remarkable exchange at the March 12 Zoom meeting of the citywide “Equity Roundtable.” Here are excerpts:*

#### **Bazile:**

The McKinley School serves the largest population of students who are segregated in a special school, primarily Black students, primarily males who are classified with emotional and behavioral impairments, and they’ve been completely left out of the conversation. ... There are no students, zero, who go on to a four year college. Less than 20% graduate in four years.

I urgently challenge you to address the crumbling structure where students must go through metal detectors, are met with school police, yet they have to take the same tests, and then they’re blamed for failure. There’s no gym, no cafeteria, no labs. This is the reality of being educated while black.

How does the capital plan address the McKinley School? And how has the equity planning tool been applied?

#### **Kuder:**

You’re right to call that out. The McKinley is at the intersection of a number of our failures. We don’t have a 125 school plan. ... Building that plan is going to take us time.

The other thing that has not happened is a rigorous equity analysis about our capital plan, certainly in recent memory, starting with the data of who has access to high quality buildings, where do we see the least access. And what is the explicit racial strategy for addressing that. That’s the part we’re building now, and I’m committed to that.

are subpar. The other sites also have inadequate facilities and crumbling infrastructures. BuildBPS has a 10-year plan that addresses the structural needs of school buildings, but does not address the needs of the McKinley Schools, and the BPS’s capital improvement plan has not addressed structural flaws in its budget, which is supposed to use the equity planning tool to prioritize the neediest schools. Additionally, McKinley students are shut out from access to vocational programming.

A 2020 DESE reports a 61.2% rate of chronic absenteeism of McKinley’s Black students, and an overall 60.4% chronic absenteeism rate of all McKinley students.

The current school leader, who also oversaw the McKinley Schools as assistant superintendent for special education for the past eight years and is responsible for the current disastrous 2020 state audit results, discontinued a crucial satellite program that was a gateway making it possible to transition McKinley students back to their home schools.

Without access to less restrictive placements, students remain locked out of general education settings because schools are resistant to re-enrolling McKinley students. This fuels McKinley’s chronic absenteeism, dropout rates, and the special education to prison pipeline. Given the overall failure rate of all students, primarily Black students as well as Latinx and English learners, there is no justification to continue the current McKinley model; maintaining its name adds further insult to the fight for equity and liberation of Black students.

### **“Systemic failure”**

A state audit released in January 2020 concludes Boston’s special education department is in “systemic failure.” BPS places 36% of its Black students with disabilities in substantially separate settings, compared to placing 17% of White students with disabilities. Why does this happen? Societal racism does not disappear in school settings. School staff require professional learning to effectively create school cultures that nurture the learning of Black boys.

McKinley Schools require immediate systemic reform to dismantle unjust policies and practices and provide McKinley students a quality education in the current site.

BPS made quiet plans to demolish the 90 Warren Street McKinley site, build a new \$83 million dollar state-of-the-art building for the high-performing Quincy Upper School, and displace the current student population. McKinley staff staged a protest, the project was abandoned, and there has been no new plan to repair or reconstruct the building. BPS must resist gentrifying the McKinley buildings for other students and keep the sites for its current students.

### **How to fix it**

The McKinley Schools’ vision and purpose must be reimaged and reconstructed with a renaming ceremony and fresh leadership dedicated to equity, diversity, and inclusion. To reframe the conversation and provide aspirational and excellent educational leadership, the Equity, Strategy and Opportunity Gaps (ESOG) team should lead the charge. BPS has not funded the ESOG team and must do so to ensure this unit has adequate resources to conduct transformative work with school staff, revise practices in all BPS sites, and hold schools accountable for educating Black and Brown students — wholly, equitably, and successfully free of bias and racism. To address the longstanding problem of sentencing Black students to segregated settings, BPS should do the following:

### **A new name and a new approach for the McKinley Schools**

- **Change the name of the McKinley Schools to the Melvin H. King Schools.**

There is already a beautiful mural created by students and staff to honor King for his work in establishing the school and defending the neighborhood from gentrification. His name should be on this school as it launches a community-focused vision reflective of Mel King’s life work.

*continued on page 7*



# CAT: Building Structures to Give Our Union Claws...

continued from page 5

your CAT structures. Does it make sense to do it by grade level team? To do it geographically by where folks are in the building? To do it by established social connections? There is no wrong way as long as it makes sense to you and your school. Think about relationships and who talks to one another!

CATs are all about organizing, and that means having real conversations and forming real connections. Start with one-on-one conversations with members where you elicit some of their concerns, needs, and ideas for improvement. Let them know that there is a way to be more involved and to have their voice heard. Organizing conversations are about listening, but then turning issues and concerns into plans to come together and take action. Building those authentic relationships with our fellow workers leads us to care about the issues they care about and to be willing to stand up and fight for each other.

In her book *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown spells out her core principles, one of which is “Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass — build the resilience by building relationships” (42). Our experience with these new Contract Action Team structures has shown us once again that our power as a union comes from our relationships with one another.

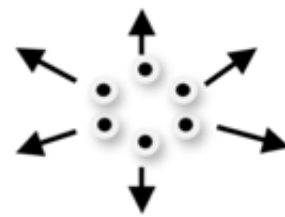
## CATS in the context of leadership

CATs represent an opportunity for our union to build a structure of deep, shared leadership. Marshall Ganz, a professor of Leadership and Organizing at Harvard University, elaborates various models of leadership. In one model, the

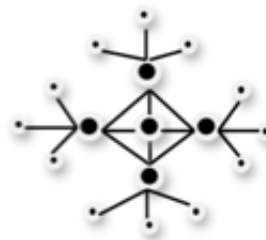
leader is a dot at the center of all the people, represented by arrows. This is not only overwhelming for the leader, who has to do all the work and make all the decisions, but frustrating for all the other people. Sometimes the leader is so busy that people can't even get through to them. And often people's skills, capacity, and time go underutilized. What happens, too, if the leader in the middle suddenly disappears? There is not enough shared knowledge or power to create a sustainable organization. Think about this model. Have you ever experienced it in your school or in the BTU? How does it feel?



The flip side of the single-dot model is one in which we say, “everyone's a leader.” In this model, people are allotted far more responsibility and decision-making power. But where is the unity? Often, this model results in chaos and disorganization. There is no coordination between all the leaders. Decision-making is unclear. Under this model, it's nearly impossible to move with unity to achieve shared goals.



The final model Ganz offers is a snowflake. In this model, there are many leaders, but they're coordinated. Each leader is connected to the central decision-maker,



only a small number of people, allowing them to build real relationships and clear communication. Furthermore, the success of each leader depends on developing the leadership of others.

We're aiming to build a snowflake model of leadership in our union. Building Reps work with CAT Leaders, who support their CAT Members, who communicate with membership. Each school is supported by a CAT Coach, a rank-and-file member whose role is to focus on supporting a handful of schools to develop strong CAT structures. CAT coaches are supported by organizing staff. For some schools that have struggled to maintain union involvement, CAT teams can become pipelines for leadership development.

as well as to one another, creating layers of communication and support. And each leader is responsible for coordinating

## Hopes for the future

In working towards an organizing model of unionism we can shift our union culture to one where all workers have a voice, all workers feel like a part of something bigger than themselves, and where we can stand together in solidarity. The BTU is not just one person, not just leadership, not just our Executive Board, it is each and every one of us and the more of us who stand together the more powerful we will be and the more equipped we will be to fight and re-imagine better schools for all. We can not afford to be complacent in our membership to our union; we all have a responsibility to be active and have our voice heard if we want to impact real change. We were not fully ready to organize during the pandemic, and CATs are an important tool that will help us be prepared to tackle immense challenges like school re-opening. Improving school level organizing helps us win the fights we want to win.

To get involved, contact organizer Ari Branz: [abranz@btu.org](mailto:abranz@btu.org)

## It Must Be Spring

By Joan Devlin,  
BTU-RTC Secretary

We hope that you are well and have had an opportunity to get your vaccination against COVID-19. Your health and safety are of primary importance during this time.

But Spring is here and hope is in the air. We retirees know it is Spring because the Boston Retirement Board announced that it will take testimony on its recommendations for COLA increases for next year. On April 28, 2021 at 10:00 am the Board will meet and COLA is on the agenda. This article will be too late to serve as a call to arms to have all members express their concern to the Board that the COLA Base be increased as well.

Since the state adopted the current laws governing public employee pensions, Boston has raised the COLA base twice. Mayor Menino raised the base from \$12,000 to \$13,000 in 2012 and Mayor Walsh raised the base in 2017 to its current \$14,000.

### Why is the COLA base so important?

**COLA INCREASES APPLY ONLY TO A PORTION OF THE EMPLOYEES PENSION.** The law allows local retirement boards to increase the pension base that is used to calculate the pension increase to up to \$18,000. We are asking the Board to raise our base to the \$18,000 permitted by the law. Other cities and towns have already adopted the highest base in the law. Boston is uniquely able to do so this year.

Boston tax revenues remain strong even during the pandemic. The city has a strong economy and surplus. It deferred payment of its back-pension shortage (using the high rate of return from the employee pension monies) rather than full payment in 2025 by a few years, giving the city sufficient room to accommodate the rise in the base.



Raising the base by \$4,000 seems like a lot, but remember that the \$18,000 will serve as the amount of money that is affected by the COLA increase. Thus, raising the base by that amount produces a smaller impact on the individual pension than you might imagine,

Using the current base, a 3% increase would mean that each member of the pension system receives \$35 more each month. Even with the increase 3% produces an increase of only \$45 per month for each retiree. For retirees receiving a small pension (less than \$30,000 per year) every raise in monthly income is essential.

The Board will vote on a COLA increase and on increasing the base used to calculate that increase at the May 19, 2021 meeting of the board. We need your help in writing to the Board before May 19. Tell them the impact the increased costs of living that you face from health care increases, increases in drug prescription costs, MBTA fares, gas prices, food costs, taxes, etc.

Watch for the RTC bulletin that will give you additional information about how to contact the Boston Retirement Board and an update of their April 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### Not the Only Thing!

We want to welcome our new members to the RTC. There are some things we would like to share with you.

## Know Your Rights...

continued from page 3

days immediately preceding, following or including the day of death. Holidays, vacations or suspended sessions shall be considered school days under this provision. One (1) day without loss of pay shall be provided for a niece, nephew, uncle, aunt, and in-law other than above. Three (3) days without loss of pay shall be provided for a grandchild/parent.”

### What is the severance pay policy in the BPS for teachers?

The BTU Contract details, “Persons who retire, resign, or die after ten (10) years of teaching in the BPS shall be paid at the ratio of 40% of accumulated, unused sick days, without limitation. Payment shall be based on the annual rate of pay of the person at the time of death, retirement or resignation. In the event of death, payment shall be made to the estate.” ... “severance shall be paid in two installments. One half of the payment shall be made on or before December 31<sup>st</sup> of the year of retirement, and the other half shall be paid on or before December 31<sup>st</sup> of the year after retirement.” If a person has taught less than ten full years in the BPS, they lose their accumulated sick days if they leave the system.

### Do I get time off for having a student teacher or intern?

If a teacher becomes a cooperating teacher, the contract outlines the following. “Each cooperating teacher shall be given two days of leave with pay, without loss of benefits. Such days shall be taken as mutually agreed upon by the teacher and the administrative head during the last two weeks of the student-teacher training period. In cases of conflict, seniority shall prevail in the selection of days.” This coverage was designed to be given by having the student teacher cover for the days so that it is a no cost item for the BPS. If a cooperating teacher does not arrange for the coverage while the student teacher is still in the classroom, the cooperating teacher loses the benefit. It's a use it or lose it scenario.

### How is the student member selected to serve on high school SSC's?

Student members of School-Site Councils at the high school level must be elected by the entire student body. They cannot be appointed by the administration; they must be elected expressly for this purpose. The student member represents all students on the SSC.



## Correcting the Record

*Editor's Note: This is an Op-Ed piece Dave Russell submitted to the Boston Globe in response to a piece written about the McKinley School, a school he served for over 30 years.*

I retired in September 2020 after teaching for 32 years at McKinley South End Academy, and I do not recognize my school in Bianca Vasquez Toness' April 22<sup>nd</sup> article, "While most Boston schools remained closed, one opened its doors. Yet almost no one came."

I am very proud of the outstanding work done there by our skilled and dedicated staff.

The clear impression from the article is that this is a low quality school. We read about, from different sources, "the lack of trust, the lack of relationship, the lack of connection parents and families feel for McKinley;" it's environment being "a hostile one;" it being "a stressful place;" and it being "a place that doesn't value their [parents'] opinions."

One student is profiled, and he is given seven paragraphs to air his views. We learn that he "just got really bored," "just felt so fidgety," and, according to his mother, "doesn't like going to school."

A parent who speaks positively — "she loves the teachers at the schools, particularly how

they have skillfully related to her son" — is given less than a sentence.

Though the article states that "A full 66 percent of students at the McKinley schools were chronically absent the year before the pandemic," the Boston Public Schools 2020 Report Card for the McKinley Schools reports average daily attendance of 76.4%.

### What is the reality?

First, the McKinley Schools are special schools for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. All our stu-

dents have not been able to be successful at other schools, and we welcome the challenge of supporting them to find their way forward.

What are remarkable, and you would get no sense of this from reading the article, are the triumphs, against the odds, that are routine at McKinley.

Read what Jeff, a former student, wrote to me:

"It means a lot that people like you made the kind of guy I can be proud of cause I could very well have gone a different way.

"I had no idea at the time how easily and readily the system would have spit me out but you guys never gave up. And continued to expect better from me. And taught me to expect better for myself.

"But know that you guys saved lives maybe hundreds if you think about the kids that you gave another chance or maybe thousands if you think about the lives we may have effected since."

### A "hostile" environment?

What is accomplished at the McKinley Schools can be seen in the stream of former students who come back to visit, two years later, five years later, and more.

Recently a man from Florida, married with four kids, 33 years old came back to visit. He said, "Every time I come back to Boston I need to come to McKinley to thank you for what you did."

A couple of years ago a new student literally came in the front door and ran out the back on the first day. In the days that followed he resisted joining in our tradition of picture taking. In about a month he agreed to be in a group photo but looked straight down at the floor.

But late in the spring he looked into the camera with a bright smile as he held in his hands an open book that he was reading. He agreed to have a 20X30 enlargement of

that beautiful picture displayed in our hall.

Why the contrast? Shortly before the second photo he told me he had never spent the whole year at the same school before. Not surprisingly, he had been hesitant to trust and connect. But as we do with our students, we patiently, persistently, and eventually, persuasively build relationships, and he began to blossom as a result.

Are the McKinley Schools perfect? No. Do we succeed with all students? No. Do we need to make improvements? Yes.

## It Must Be Spring...

*continued from page 6*

The RTC office is open every Wednesday and Thursday from 10:00 am-2:00 pm. You can call the BTU office and speak to the Chair, Marilyn Marion or the Vice Chair Roz Avant to ask questions relating to the benefits of membership in the RTC, to apply for Delta Dental insurance and Eye Care benefits; or get help in resolving problems with the benefits or pension questions.

The RTC holds two business meetings each year... one in the spring and the other in the fall. We also have social events throughout the year including a hosted luncheon in the Fall and a ticketed luncheon in the Spring, as well as a Jazz Brunch during the winter holidays.

We also have a travel program that has been on hold during the pandemic and if everything continues to improve we can hit the road again!

Check out our Facebook page for the latest news and articles of interest. Please like and follow our page at <https://www.facebook.com/BTURTC/>.

Calling all retired Paraprofessionals! You are invited to join the RTC. Your dues are \$2 per month, deducted from your pension when you sign up for membership. You are invited to all events and of

I am proud to be part of the McKinley family. We have dedicated our hearts and minds to our cause, and through our efforts we have helped many of our precious students to achieve things that others did not think they could do.

*(David Russell worked at McKinley South End Academy from 1988-2020. He was a 2001 Boston Teacher of the Year and a 2006 Boston Celtics Hero Among Us. He is self-publishing a book, To Change the World: Reflections of a Teacher.)*

course, we work to improve our pension and health care benefits.

### And it is Election Year at the BTU

RTC members are members of the BTU and will receive two ballots for the upcoming BTU elections. One ballot is for the officers of the RTC-Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer the other for the BTU officers, Executive Board and Delegates to all affiliated bodies.

There will be no primary this year. All RTC members are encouraged to vote for the officers of the BTU and the RTC.

The BTU Election Committee adopted a mail in ballot as well as an in-person option for participating in the election. Ballots will be mailed out May 10, 2021 and must be received back by June 1, 2021. The in-person option will occur on June 2, 2021 at the BTU Hall.

You can find all the Election information on the BTU website by entering the Member Portal.



**Let us end where we began. Spring is time for renewal and hope. Stay safe and be well.**

## Fix Boston's McKinley Schools: Rename Them "Melvin H. King Schools" and Reimagine Their Vision and Purpose...

*continued from page 5*

• **Employ and empower parents, caretakers, students, and community members who reflect the student demographics to identify highly qualified leadership** with a proven track record of constructing an inclusionary school setting where students receive high-quality therapeutic and academic support necessary to create bridges to home schools. Give the new leadership the discretionary authority to achieve excellent results on behalf of Black and Latinx students who have been left behind by the racist McKinley Schools policies.



Mel King.

*(Photo: Jeff Warren, Creative Commons license)*

### Change BPS special education

• **More broadly, in the entire district, support and empower the Equity, Strategy and Opportunity Gaps team**

**to do the work of dismantling racist structures** and reconstructing policies, procedures, and practices using cultural-

ly and linguistically sustaining practices that lead to eliminating racially unjust disciplinary practices and disproportionality in special education.

• **Design and apply specific protocols to ensure the practice of segregation of Black boys ends** and to ensure that when special education is needed, it is the right service. The BPS special education department is overwhelmingly white. The district must employ a cadre of highly qualified Black educators to address the challenge of overrepresentation of Black students in special education.

• **Provide all students high-quality early screening prior to kindergarten**, and for students predicted to struggle, deliver rapid, early intervening, appropriate tiered literacy/reading interventions with data-driven progress in the general education classroom.

• **Employ a cadre of highly qualified reading/literacy specialists to make data-driven instructional decisions** and provide evidence-based appropriately tiered interventions rooted in

appropriately paced supports that result in improved performance for students who require these targeted interventions.

• **Begin planning developmentally appropriate college and career readiness as soon as students enter school** by ensuring they are provided high-quality content instruction and positive behavioral supports and interventions that are data driven, provided by highly qualified staff who are regularly engaged in evidence-based professional learning, and facilitate learning with alignment to standards-based content instruction.

Mel King had a wonderful vision, but it has been derailed. For the sake of hundreds of children, most especially Black boys, who are entitled to a high-quality education that will place them on the track to pursue their dreams and fulfill their life goals, we must get the McKinley Schools back on track.

*(Edith Bazile is a former BPS special educator and administrator and former President of the Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts [BEAM].)*



# An Unpopular Opinion: I Shall Miss Quarantine

I am thrilled to be getting back to normal life. My parents' have had their vaccinations. My school district is calling students back to the classrooms. The normal cycle of life is returning just as the snow is melting. It all seems like it is part of the spring-rebirth cycle.

Nonetheless I shall miss my year long quarantine. While many joke about the trouble of too-much-togetherness, I have been given a rare opportunity for this parent of teenagers: I got to spend time with them.

Both my children attend the same school in which I teach. This year my son is in the same grade that I teach. And while I knew I would not have him in my class, I thought I would get to see him every day in the freshmen wing of our school. At the very least I might get to know his friends who would be in my class. (Knowing your children's friends is an invaluable parental tool.) Alas, COVID changed all that.

I am now Zoom teaching several of my son's friends. Yes, they are indeed my students; but I don't truly know them as we are on screens and most have their cameras off. And I don't get to see my son either in the hallways or interacting with his pals.

I do, however, get to see my son every-day! Yay! I see him all day, every day. While this may seem like an obvious statement, I want to remind everyone of what

was and will soon be the normal teenage life: avoiding their parents. Teens go to school, have a job, partake in after school clubs, and - when they are home - sequester themselves in their rooms.

This was my daughter's first year at the school. Do you remember your first day at a new school? Now imagine trying to do that on Zoom. Chatting in a breakout room is not the same as sharing a lean over to the person next to you to have a conspiratorial chat.

Fortunately several friends from her old school are also attending the new school. When the weather permitted these friends formed a learning pod where once a week they would gather in a backyard and attend separate Zoom classes together. What a unique experience for them. (When I went to my first day of high school I did not see my best friend at all since the scheduling gods had conspired against us.) The camaraderie of my daughter's friends was therefore even more lovely to watch.

I have also gained a great appreciation for the work of my colleagues. Before the pandemic I tried my best to visit other classrooms in order to know what else my students were experiencing. I'd see the posters with foreign languages captions plastered in the hallways, and maybe I'd

catch a glimpse of a science experiment as I passed the labs as I stretched my legs on my off period. But this past year I had a bird's eye view of the incredible, interactive assignments my colleagues were using in class. I'm not ashamed to say that I copied many of their ideas for my own classes.

This past year both my children have grown, figuratively and literally. Over the past twelve months I have observed my children not only master remote learning better than I have, but I've witnessed them gain independence in their school and homework. They have become better writers, have learned new languages, and have kept themselves on schedule far better than I did when I was their age in the 1980s.

And I have seen them literally grow. The early teenage years bring enormous physical transformations, most noticeably is height. While their growth spurts would have happened with or without the pandemic, the extra sleep from staying at home certainly helped. Pre-pandemic the alarm clock thundered in our house at 0530 hours. Our high school started at 7:20 AM - the earliest in the city - but thanks to Zoom all students got to sleep in later, sometimes until the very start of class. Thanks to a full year of a good night's sleep, my children and indeed all students have gotten the best rest of their scholastic lives. What a change awaits us all.



**Michael J. Maguire**  
Boston Union Teacher  
Co-Editor

Nonetheless the return to the "old" normal is both inevitable and needed. Routines are good and predictability is healthy for us all. But please join with me in not condemning our so-called lost year. Let us remember the unexpected gifts that time has given us, let us replicate them frequently as we return to normal.

*(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin and Ancient Greek at Boston Latin Academy.)*

*(Published by Commonwealth Magazine - March 24, 2021.)*



*Editors' Note: Colleen Hart's picture and statement were not included in the last edition of the Boston Union Teacher. We regret the error.*

**PARAPROFESSIONAL/  
SUBSTITUTE/ABA  
FIELD REPRESENTATIVE**

**Colleen Hart**

My name is Colleen Hart; I am your Paraprofessional/Substitute/ABA Field Rep. I have been in this role for almost four years. It has been my pleasure getting to know my fellow union members more closely in my time as a field rep. I would love the opportunity to continue to advocate to create a better working environment for each of us. If re-elected, I will continue to grow more training programs for the paraprofessionals and opportunities where other can share in expertise. I also plan on providing more training opportunities for substitutes, as well as advocate for the many challenges they face. Another focus, if re-elected, would be to work with the ABAs on understanding their contract and find ways to improve as they are still the newest bargaining unit.



I feel that my experience as a paraprofessional for 21 years and a building rep for 13 years has helped me in my role as Field Rep advocating for my fellow union brothers and sisters. I hope you consider me for re-election for the Paraprofessional/Substitute/ABA Field Rep.

I am also running Delegate to represent the Boston Teachers Union. In role as delegate I have been able to meet many other union members from other locals. It was great opportunity to learn and collaborate and stand in solidarity many unions. I hope to be able continue being delegate to represent the BTU family.

Please remember to vote for Colleen for Paraprofessional/Substitute/ABA Field Rep and Delegate in your Hart you know she is right!!!!

## Boston Teachers Union and AFT Massachusetts' Annual Conference For Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel on April 10, 2021

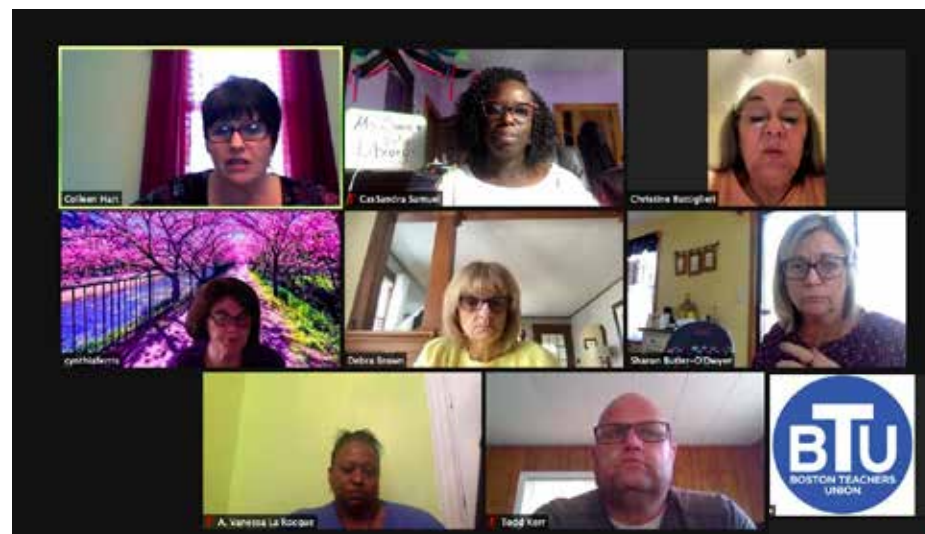
**B**TU Paraprofessional and Substitute Field Representative **Colleen Hart** welcomed all members to the virtual presentation of the 35<sup>th</sup> annual PSRP conference stating how grateful she is for all who made the conference possible. AFT-MA president **Beth Kontos** said that this year we would need more than a day to celebrate all the hard work paraprofessionals and related service providers have done this past year.

The conference was divided into the following three workshops. Participants rotated from one breakout room to another.

### Workshops

**There is No Union Without You! From Union to Community; Why Your Voice Matters**

**Khalida Smalls**, Organizing Director at the Boston Teachers Union and **Jeremy Shenk**, the Campaign Coordinator for AFT Massachusetts led a conversation with fellow AFT members from Boston and around the state on how to engage with our unions and the importance of all members being involved. They stressed that who we are and what we do matters, and that it is critical that we work with our fellow union members to make our union locals, school districts, and communities better through collective action.



BTU Paraprofessional Council

**After the Vaccine: Going Forward in a Healthy Work Environment**

**Al Vega** and **Ben Weilerstein** from MassCOSH asked us to think about how many times a day we might think about whether our workplace was safe before the pandemic? How many times a day do we think about it now? The COVID-19 pandemic has created a "new normal" when it comes to safety & health on the job. It is important that we as union members have a say in shaping the post-pandemic workplace.

**Healthy Habits: Looking for a Pick Me Up**

**Zachary Biedermann**, **Charles Armstrong-Hicks**, and **Dr. Ivonne Borrero** from Behavioral Health Services; and **Amina Elmansouri** and **Iris Nieves**

from Succeed Boston @ CIC led a professional development called "Looking For A Pick Me Up" in which participants:

- Explored what self-care is and why it is important
- Identified different types of self care
- Practiced different forms of self-care
- Created a plan for how they will use self-care in their lives
- Were made aware of various resources in the community

We closed the conference with slide shows and comments for local presidents to their paras around their work and dedicated over the last year.

We can't wait to be back in person to celebrate with each and every one... hopefully next year!