

Boston Teachers Union Election 2021

Campaigning
With the BTU



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President's Report Jessica J. Tang

Be Water:

Power, Unity, Flexibility and Strength

As we dive deeper into another school year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have learned that one thing is for certain: we must be ready to expect the unexpected. How, then, do you prepare for a school year where scenarios and situations that were once somewhat predictable and routine have now become often unpredictable and constantly change? What do you do when even the most well thought out plans often don't go as planned, are unexpectedly upended or impacted by changes far beyond your control?

These were some of the questions on my mind as we discussed the theme of this year's BTU Fall Leadership Conference. What do we need to confront the unexpected and continue to advocate to the best of our ability, even during tumultuous times, for the schools our students, educators and communities deserve? How do we do this work while the political climate continues to become very divisive and continues to polarize even families as they grapple with different opinions regarding everything from COVID vaccinations, masking policies to climate change and racial justice. All the while misinformation, lack of institutional trust and social isolation further exacerbate these challenges. The answer came from a somewhat unexpected source: Bruce Lee.

I had recently watched a new ESPN movie about the famous martial arts star Bruce Lee, called "Be Water" and his words came to mind. As a WBUR article (June 04, 2020 "Be Water" Explores Life And Legacy Of Martial Arts Star Bruce Lee) explained: "Be Water," references a famous quote from Lee: "Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless — like water. You put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend."

What in the world does that have to do with our union? Quite a bit, actually. What many of us have learned from the challenges of the pandemic is that we need to maintain our collective power and unity as we respond to crises. To do so, we also need to be flexible and maintain our strength. To do so, we also have to empty our minds and start with a blank slate. Like water, we have had to quickly adapt, change form, change how we have done things in the past but still

stay unified as much as possible to confront the unexpected challenges. Like water, if we are divided and split apart, we can lose our strength, but if we are able to adapt and stay together, like a wave or a river, we can move shores and cut through mountains.

This has not been easy to do in times of crisis when emotions run high and we are all impacted by stress, anxiety and fear—it is easy for us to become divided. It is easy to start to blame each other. We often lose our patience and when trust and assumptions of best intentions become even more difficult to maintain when we are also often isolated from each other and unable to interact in the ways we were used to—especially when trust and collegiality have never been so important. Some relationships never have the chance to develop and some relationships can easily become strained because we haven't had the same opportunities to get to know each other. And in some ways, we have forgotten even just how to talk to each other in person instead of just behind screens.

When we are trying to solve problems, especially oftentimes with limited resources and under stressful circumstances, it really takes a conscientious and intentional effort to come together instead of pulling away from each other or becoming defensive. When there is much going wrong it is easy to fall into the trap of dwelling on the negative, instead of moving forward and progressing. These circumstances have also often been further exacerbated by another necessary, but often uncomfortable topic that can further cause division: the need to address racial justice.

Just as we need to empty and open our minds to adapt, grow and, therefore, become stronger and more unified as we learn together and confront new crises, so, too, must we do this when we address the real historical, systematic and institutional impacts of racism and white supremacy that permeates not just the education sector, but all aspects of our society — from the founding of our nation to today. We cannot just be colorblind, because when the impacts

of injustice aren't colorblind, neither can the solutions.

This work, however, is not easy. It requires a tremendous amount of self-reflection, self-awareness and willingness to learn in a space that is often uncomfortable. And this applies to all, because we all have something to learn. Whether it is about anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, racism directed towards Latinx or indigenous communities, or intersections of all of the above including gender, disability and sexual orientation as well, everyone has something to learn. And just as our students need specific environment and conditions to be able to learn at their best, so, too, do adults.

Just as with our students, it also includes a need for social emotional wellness skills and awareness. It requires building a shared analysis and vocabulary. Just as we need to lower the affective filter of ELs to practice oral proficiency as they learn a new language but might be afraid to make mistakes, adults often need to be in a similar state for optimal learning. There will be discomfort, but not at the point at which someone is panicking, shutting down or too self-conscious to try. And just as we know we have to differentiate for our students, the same is for adults learning about racial justice as well.

That doesn't mean we slow down the work, and it's not an excuse not to challenge or stretch ourselves to learn and grow, but it does mean we have to be thoughtful about how we approach the work of racial justice and meet people where they are at on the spectrum of understanding racial inequities. I recently participated in a professional development opportunity through the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance led by Re:Power that addressed many of the challenges of racial justice work, and, again reminded me of not just of where we need to go, but how to get there. Racial justice work is critical not just to confront the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also our work as a union that believes in equitable schools and communities for all.

We as a union, must continue to support this work and we will: through



Jessica J. Tang
BTU President

what we are fighting for in our master contract; through our racial justice committees; through our conferences and professional development opportunities; but perhaps, most importantly, through individual commitments to the work that, as we continue to adapt and grow together, will collectively become the rivers and waterfalls we need to cut through the historical boulders and blunders upon which our nation was built. Taking time to reflect on our own union's history, acknowledge where we have fallen short and where we must both repair harm and move forward is also critical.

This theme and work will continue throughout the school year as we continue to collectively confront challenges. This is the first part of what I hope will be followed by others who share their experiences and learning. However, in the meantime, here are some concrete reflections of some of my own reflections both from Re:Power and many other readings as we continue to "be water" and face both the unexpected and expected challenges ahead. As Dr. Bettina Love has shared, we need to move from awareness (seeing with new eyes) to shared analysis (understanding the "why") and then to action (internal or external). While there is always urgency, we cannot skip the shared analysis and learning because action without analysis causes harm. As we learn together:

- Try to notice your reactions. Instead of just reacting, try to take a deep breath and observe your feelings so that you can respond in a productive way instead of just reacting.
- Know what you don't know. Just because you have not experienced something does not mean someone else has not. Opening up our minds to knowing what is currently unknown is a way to be flexible and adapt.
- Try to "mind your zone"...meaning, are you too comfortable, necessarily uncomfortable-enough that you are learning outside of your comfort

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Meet the New Co-Editor of the Boston Union Teacher, Anne Slater

The Peer-to-Peer column was formed through a big idea and some collaborative brainstorming between colleagues in the Peer Assistance program. We all figured that the BTU Newspaper would be the best vehicle to share our notes from the field to the teachers in our audience who might benefit from our relatable experiences on teaching and learning across the district. While contributing writers have come and gone over the years, **Anne Slater** has been a consistent voice sharing her observations, insights, and above all, her writing. In addition to contributing to this column, Anne has recently taken on the role of Co-Editor of the **Boston Union Teacher Newspaper** with **Michael Maguire**.

I asked Anne a few questions as she begins a new school year in a new school and now with a new co-editing side hustle about her writing and her ideas for the column and for the paper.

★★★★★

It is hard to think of a time when Anne didn't consider herself a writer. At an early age she was interested in reading, "a ton of fantasy books, Lord of the Rings and others" and dabbled a bit in writing but it wasn't until she took a course at Lesley College that she really began thinking of writing as a vocation. We talked a lot about how young women in our generation were often discouraged from pursuing degrees in writing or majoring in the liberal arts. Careers in the writing and publishing industry for women were often difficult to break into and weren't lucrative enough to be and stay fully independent. The famed glass ceiling in this generation was often opaque and impenetrable. Television shows of this era encouraged young women to "have it all" – career, home, and family, but often showed these working women in business but not often novelists, unless you were an old retired teacher living in Cabot Cove, Maine. So instead, Anne, like many of us, joined the family business in education.

There is a place where teaching students to write and crafting stories for others to read clearly intersect. Many adult writing courses use the workshop model and mentoring to help draw out stories from authors in the way teachers cajole students to put words on paper. Anne discovered the workshop model for herself; reading her work and receiving feedback from fellow writers, as a dynamic way to



Anne Slater models a lesson in Michelle Hall's grade 2 at the James Ellis School.

produce several of her own works. Mentorship, however, was the key to help her even consider writing as an option. With a certain amount of trepidation, Anne trusted one of her professors with a short story and eventually through a year-long mentoring relationship, crafted a novel. Anne reflects, "I spent the time with my mentor talking about ideas, developing small topics into larger pieces," and through each powerful experience gained the confidence to take more workshops and classes where she could meet others and continue making her own words fly while talking about writing with other like-minded individuals.

Anne has big ideas for how she'd like to empower other teacher writers who are reading the *Boston Union Teacher Newspaper*. "It would be great to see a variety of writing in the paper, like comics or poems," in addition to the important advocacy content that already exists. There is a huge amount of talent in our district and hopefully the paper can highlight some of the work teachers are already doing while creating a supportive network of colleagues that build up

each other's writing projects. After three school years impacted by COVID and its subsequent season of isolation and disconnect, "hearing people's stories can help us stay more connected". There are so many ways we get information these days and writing takes on many different forms and iterations. What better way to build the community and support our Union by getting more of the membership to submit their stories to the paper

to spur discussion and generate rich discourse in our schools and classrooms?

Anne's day job is supporting the East Boston Early Education Center (EEC) community as a literacy coach. We also talked about what a unique and surreal experience it is as a writer to help develop young writers as they work through the crafting process. Though it may seem to some that writing is an independent task, some of the most reluctant writers grow through collaboration. The workshop model can be taught to even our youngest students as they brainstorm, write, share, and through feedback and subsequent revisions grow as writers. Workshopping can also help seasoned writers and even teacher writers get better at their craft as we help our students. Anne sees the opportunity in the work ahead, in her school and also at the *Boston Union Teacher* newspaper. I can't imagine a better time or opportunity to get writing. I can also imagine the rejoicing when Anne gets all of her drafts out of her folders and across the publishing finish line.

If you have an idea for a story or a topic you would like to see in this column, or even a cartoon or graphic to share, we'd love to hear from you. If you have a passion for writing and are looking for an outlet, we'd also like to connect. Welcome **Anne Slater** to the administrative side of the writing world – the new co-editor of the *Boston Union Teacher Newspaper*.

★★★★★

The Peer-to-Peer column is written by Anne Slater (aslater@btu.org) and Lauren Clarke-Mason (lclarkemason@bostonpublicschools.org). If you have a topic you'd like us to explore, please email us.

Best wishes to Garret Virchick as he begins new adventures

Garret Virchick, who retired from full-time teaching, had been substitute teaching while continuing to serve on the BTU Executive Board and as co-editor to the *Boston Union Teacher* newspaper.

Always a fierce advocate for educational equity and for social justice, Garret was never shy or circumspect about his opinions in the union hall or in the pages of this newspaper.

This year, Garret decided not to run for re-election to the Executive Board and not to continue on as co-editor of the *Boston Union Teacher*. We shall miss his passion and his humor; but we are happy that he's happy to begin new adventures. *Ave atque vale.*

Thank you **Garret Virchick**, for your leadership, commitment and contributions over the decades to the Boston Teachers Union – You have undoubtedly left a long-lasting legacy and personally supported and paved the path for so many new leaders and activists in the union! *-JT*



Garret Virchick

Be Water: Power, Unity, Flexibility and Strength...

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zone, or just panicking? How can you get back into the zone of discomfort where our greatest learning can happen?

- Prepare for imperfection. No one is perfect, and we learn from mistakes. There is always someone who is more "down" or "woke." There is no need to be self-righteous or, conversely, beat yourself up for imperfection or get consumed by shame or guilt. Learn, correct and try again and help others to do the same. White ally ship should not be about proving that you are not racist or by calling others out. It's about the work of helping others learn and making space for people of color to be able to share their truths.
- Try to understand that anti-racism work includes every day conscious decisions to make equitable choices each day. Not having to think about

the impact of race or being unaware of its impact is an example of white privilege and serves to maintain the status quo.

- Make time for self awareness and self reflection.
- Don't give up.

As **Bao Nguyen** shared in the WBUR article, "Bruce Lee was 'a student of everyone that he taught and everyone that he interacted with,' including his first student, **Jesse Glover**. As a young black man, Glover wanted to learn self-defense through martial arts because he was a victim of police brutality. 'I think that idea really informed Bruce. He created his ideas of bridging the gap, of building bridges between people instead of building walls and barriers.'"

Let us, too, not just "be water" but also bridge the gaps and build the bridges that we need to stand together, continue to build power and stay strong.

Boston Sweet Treat: Boston Creme Pie or Chocolate Chip Cookies?
Chocolate chip. I'm lactose intolerant.

Would you rather teach on Valentine's Day or the Day Before Winter Break?
Valentine's Day for sure! I love Valentine's Day in Elementary School. I love getting cards from kids and heart-shaped boxes of candy. It's all about the love at school.

Books in hand or Kindle?
Paper books for sure! I don't like reading on a screen and I like to keep my books forever. I still have my childhood books.

Netflix or Hulu?
Netflix. I love Stranger Things.

Wine or Coffee?
I like both in moderation. Too much coffee makes me super talkative.

Favorite Children's novel?
My current favorite is "The Teacher's Funeral" by Richard Peck. Hilarious.

Favorite subject to teach?
Writing!

What Are Some of the Provisions in the BTU/BPS Agreement on Health & Safety for SY 2021-22?



Caren Carew
BTU Secondary
Field Representative

- BTU members will bring their own masks, but BPS will provide them by request.
- BPS will have a supply of various types of masks in various sizes, eye protection, gloves, and gowns as needed to staff in accordance with DESE and CDC guidance. BPS will provide PPE in accordance with DESE and CDC guidance for specialized groups of employees, upon request. Said employees are; ABA Based, Early Childhood Center based, ECE Inclusion, Emotional Impairment, Inclusion, Mild and Moderate Intellectual Impairment, Multiple Disabilities/Physical Impairment, Severe Multiple Disabilities, Separate Day, Specific Learning Disabilities, and Nurses. Please refer to Agreement for types of PPE for each subgroup mentioned.
- “The BPS will provide 6ft socially-distanced isolation space or room in each school for testing and isolation room in each school for testing and isolating students who are symptomatic with COVID-19 symptoms and awaiting test results or who have tested positive for COVID-19 concerns around the location, privacy and supervision of a school isolation space should be brought to the attention of the school operational leader. A team of equal numbers of BTU and BPS representatives (not to exceed six total members) selected by each respective party will visit the school to problem-solve together. Should additional space or rooms be needed the school leader will consider non-instructional spaces first.”
- BPS agrees to install and maintain indoor air quality data loggers in classrooms.
- All BPS Staff will have the opportunity to participate in BPS weekly pool testing. BTU members who are showing symptoms that have developed during the workday, should notify their supervisor and the member will be able to self-administer a rapid test, when such tests are available, in the school’s isolation space/room in order to remain in school if the test is negative.
- “Nurses will not perform student or staff pooled testing, but nurses will perform Binax rapid tests for symptomatic students. Nurses shall notify health services when there is a symptomatic student who has received a rapid Binax test and the results of the test. Nurses may also call for guidance or assistance, which may include additional staff support, if students’ needs exceed their capacity. The school nurse is not required to be the CIC coordinator.”
- “Temperatures will be monitored by the Energy Division each day, and temperature reports will be made available, upon request, showing each buildings’ average temperatures at 7:00 am, 11:00 am, and 3:00 pm for the prior day.”
- “For the purpose of contact tracing, BPS will include for “close contact” anyone who meets the definitions set forth by BPHC and CDC protocols. BPS will adhere to and follow all relevant BPHC contact tracing protocols. When BPS learns of a change in the BPHC’s definition of “close contact” or the relevant BPHC protocols it will promptly notify the BTU. After

contract tracing has been completed, BPS will communicate to the school community that there was a positive case. BPS has informed the BTU that it has hired five contact tracers for the start of the 2021-22 school year to expedite contact tracing.”

- “Asymptomatic employees identified as a school-based close contact must participate in the test and stay program in accordance with DESE & BPHC guidance.”
- “BPS will continue to report positive COVID-19 cases by school weekly on the BPS website.”
- “The BTU agrees to accept the City of Boston Vaccine Verification or Required Testing for COVID-19 (the “Policy”) in which all covered employees of the City of Boston (“City”) shall be required to verify that vaccination status; and any employee who does not verify that they are fully vaccinated will be required to submit proof every seven (7) calendar days of a negative Covid-19 screening test. The Union further agrees that the BPS has satisfied all of its bargaining obligations under M.G.L. c.150E associated with implementation of the Policy.”
- “The Parties agree that upon execution of this Agreement, the City shall re-establish a balance of ten (10) workdays (not to exceed 80 hours) of COVID-19 sick leave, as provided for in the City’s Temporary COVID-19 Sick Leave Benefits, for each Union employee. (This Agreement does not provide for a COVID-19 sick leave balance in excess of ten (10) work days/80 hours of COVID-19 sick leave as currently provided for in the City’s Temporary COVID-19 Leave Benefits). Further, the Parties agree that on the anniversary of the effective date of the Policy, and annually thereafter, the City shall re-establish a balance of then (10) workdays (not to exceed 80 hours) of COVID-19 sick leave for each Union employee for each year that the Policy remains in effect. (This Agreement does not provide for a COVID-19 sick leave balance in excess of ten (10) work days/80 hours of COVID-19 sick leave as currently provided for in the City’s Temporary COVID-19 Leave Benefit(s).

For this 2021-2022 school year, BTU bargaining unit members who are fully vaccinated, or who have documented and approved medical or religious accommodations and are in compliance with submitting weekly negative COVID-19 tests, and who exhausted the 10 days of COVID-19 leave referenced above in paragraph 13, and who test positive for COVID-19 may receive up to ten (10) additional work days of paid leave if they provide signed medical documentation that they are COVID-19 positive.”

Are educators required to teach “simultaneously” based upon the BTU/BPS Health & Safety Agreement for SY 2021-22?

No, according to said Agreement, “While BPS is operating fully in-person, educators will not be required to “simultaneously” teach. “Simultaneous teaching” is where educators are providing live instruction to students learning in the school building at the same time as students learning remotely. BTU members will provide daily relevant

coursework that can be accessed by students digitally through the school’s platform so that students who are absent can continue to make progress that aligns with their classmates and so that the students may work with outside tutors to maintain pace with classroom instruction. When an entire class is temporarily fully remote, educators may be directed to teach the class remotely. The parties agree to meet to discuss strategies for continuity of learning for students who are temporarily not able to learn in person, and, to negotiate to the extent required by law.”

When are School Site Council Elections and meetings held?

The School Site Council (SSC) is the central governing body of the school under the school-based management/shared decision-making model. The contract stipulates; “Elections for new SSC members shall be conducted as early in the school year as possible [by October 15], and a first meeting of the new council shall be held no later than October 31.” At the first meeting, a monthly calendar should be agreed upon by the SSC members for the entire school year and be made public through distribution to all staff and parents. Any change must be approved by the SSC with at least one week’s notice to all staff and parents. SSC Meetings should be at times convenient for all members and times may alternate to meet this goal.

When is the syllabus due and what must it include?

The contract details, “In September of each year all teachers shall prepare a brief outline or syllabus (one to three pages) which includes: the student learning objectives for the year, the curriculum materials they plan to cover, and any student learning projects which students are expected to produce during the school year. The outline may be supplemented with information about the amount of time students are expected to spend on homework; student attendance requirements; what students are expected to bring to class (or not bring to class); and any other information that the teacher deems appropriate to help parents understand what is expected of students. Teachers shall not be required

to repeat any information which is distributed by the school to all parents, e.g. code of discipline, homework policy, and school handbook. Two copies of this outline or syllabus shall be given to parents at the first parent teacher meeting of the school year. One copy must be signed by the parent and returned to the teacher indicating the parents understanding of the curriculum and expectations and agreeing to cooperate with the teacher in meeting the educational objectives set for the year. Parents who do not attend the meeting shall have copies mailed to them by the principal at School Department expense with a stamped return envelope to return the signed copy to the school. The school will include along with the outline or syllabus given to parents each September a schedule of times that the teachers are available to meet with parents for an individual conference about their children.”

What is the policy on scheduling individual parent/teacher conferences?

According to the collective bargaining agreement, better known as ‘the contract’; “Individual parent/teacher conferences shall be held at the school at a time that is mutually agreed upon by the parent and the teacher. If a parent is unable to come to a conference at the school, the teacher/parent conference regarding the child’s school performance shall be conducted by telephone.”

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

EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE!
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 EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE!
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Boston Teachers Union,
AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

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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 and exclusive to the publication, and in good taste.

DEADLINE:
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is October 13th.
All copy should be e-mailed to mmaguire@btu.org and aslater@btu.org
This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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Campaigning With the BTU

The Boston Teachers Union endorses candidates for elected offices. The BTU Committee on Political Education (COPE) reviews and makes recommendations for candidates we endorse. Members often ask about the process we use to endorse candidates. Here's what happens during the process.

Every two years there is an election process for Boston City elected offices. We engage in endorsing candidates for Boston City Council and we have endorsed candidates who campaign. Mayor's election cycle is every four years. The following year of Boston City Council elections we engage in endorsing candidates for Massachusetts state legislative offices. This election also occurs every two years. Candidates for state offices campaign for re-election if they are an incumbent or to be newly elected if a candidate is challenging an incumbent or campaigning for an open seat for an elected office.

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

would be a viable candidate supporting our issues a recommendation is made. The decision to make a recommendation to the E-Board is made by a 2/3's vote by the COPE Committee members. Next, the E-Board receives the recommendation and reviews information about the candidates. A vote is then held by the E-Board members to decide whether the candidate should be recommended to the membership. Again a 2/3's vote is required. Lastly, a vote is held at the BTU monthly membership meetings during which members have the chance to approve or oppose candidates. A 2/3's vote is again required to pass.

Once the BTU endorsement is approved through this process, the true work begins. The Political Director contacts the candidates to discuss their campaign. The BTU will hold member-to-member phone banks on behalf of the candidate, allowing members the opportunity to get involved with the campaign of an endorsed candidate.

If any members are interested in assisting with phone banking, they can contact the Political Director. The BTU provides a stipend to members who are interested. Members can also volunteer to support a campaign by door knocking and handing out flyers. During COVID, campaigns have safely figured out ways to begin this process. Candidates still participate in online events like forums to talk about their campaigns and fundraising. Some candidates have chosen

to leave door hangers with information about their campaign and talk to constituents socially distanced when encountered at the doors.

BEAT (BTU Electoral Action Team) is the group we use to engage our members in the election process. Ideally, we like to have at least five members from each school on this team. They have an opportunity to participate with how we interact with candidates both during and after elections. Even after a candidate is elected, it is still important to make sure they are supporting what matters. When participating with any political action, members are requested to do so only outside of school hours. If you are interested in participating with the BEAT or supporting any of our endorsed candidates contact the BTU Political team.

The September Primary was an opportunity to *Get Out To Vote!* There were three ways to vote: mail in ballot, early voting or in person. The same thing will be true for the November election. If you choose to vote by mail, you can request a ballot by going to the Secretary of State website for an application. Once you receive your ballot, members are encouraged by the BTU to mail it back as soon as possible. This is important because if your ballot is not received prior to election day it will not be counted. Early voting occurs at designated locations around the city within your municipal district.

#BTUvotes began to encourage BTU



Johnny McInnis
BTU Political Director

members to vote in every election. All elections are important including those that do not occur during the regular election cycle. Oftentimes there is what is called a Special Election when a seat is vacated in between an election cycle. Primary elections are important when multiple candidates of the same party are campaigning for the same elected position. After the Primary, the candidate or candidates move forward to November. This November we will vote on City Council candidates and a new Mayor. BTU members are encouraged to take a photo whenever supporting our endorsed candidates and after voting upload it on your social media account using the #BTUvotes. No matter which process you choose to vote, upload your photo to support the importance of voting.

If you would like more information or would like to help with anything mentioned in this article please, please contact Political Director **Johnny McInnis** at jmcinnis@btu.org or Political Organizer **Roberto Jimenez** at rjimenez@btu.org.





Great Read Alouds for October 2021

If you've ever paid attention to any Massachusetts fall meme then you'll know we are known for pumpkins, ugg, north-faces, and dunkin donuts around here come October! Even before the leaves begin to turn color, you can almost smell the pumpkin spice, apple cinnamon, and crisp fresh air approaching as you walk through all the stores getting ready for the cool down. I love a good autumn book, it's the perfect way to start the year teaching sensory details and descriptive language. You can not go wrong with *There was an Old Lady who Swallowed Some Leaves* by Lucille Colandro. However, the fall also presents plenty of other opportunities for some fantastic stories!

For starters, October 28th is National Immigrants Day and Faith Ringgold's birthday is October 8th. Faith Ringgold's book *We Came to America* not only has beautiful artwork, but also depicts America as a country rich in diversity, starting from the Native Americans who first called this country home. It's a great opportunity to talk to children about being proud of their diversity and how diversity has shaped our country.

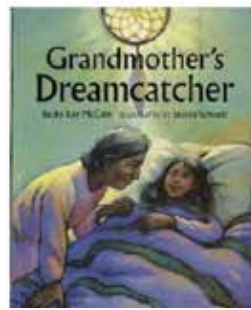
In addition, it's wayyyyyy overdue for us to start telling the truth about Indigenous People Day. We need to tell

the truths of our history all year round, regardless of the upcoming holiday or season, but in particular when the calendars are still saying Columbus Day or "State Holiday." We need to tell the truth about Indigenous People Day and celebrate and recognize the Native people who were the first inhabitants of America. We need to rethink history and the way we recognize different dates and events in history. One story that does a really good job of telling some truths is *Encounter* by Jane Yolen. This story is told from the point of view of a young Taino child who tried to warn his people about not welcoming the strangers who entered their land.

Another story I love is called *Grandmother's Dreamcatcher*. I love my grandmother so I tend to fall in love with any book that depicts that special grandmother/granddaughter relationship. In this story, the main character Kimmy

is with her grandmother for a weekend and having bad dreams and her grandmother helps her make a dreamcatcher so she can sleep at night. Lots of Native American symbols have been exploited and used offensively, so I definitely do not want that. However, I do think this story tells some history of the dreamcatcher beautifully while highlighting family.

Speaking of family, did you know that one out of every two Americans have someone close to them who is gay or lesbian? For transgender people, that number is one in ten. In honor of National Coming Out Day and just plain outright humane acceptance of everyone I also encourage starting the year off with a diverse classroom library and atmosphere in all ways. When I was a classroom teacher I made sure my classroom library was for all. I loved and love these: I know some of you are thinking how

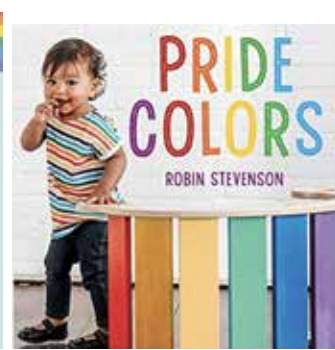
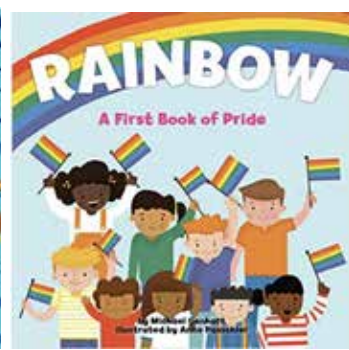
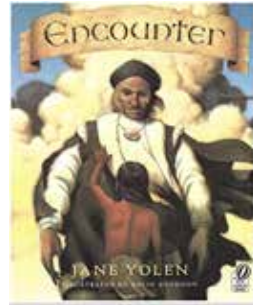
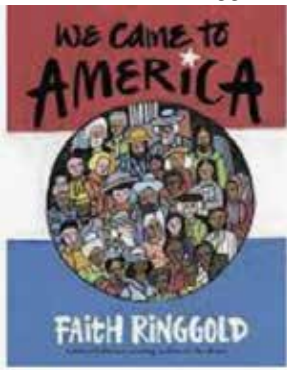


Lea Serena
BTU Elementary
Field Representative

will I fit these all in, especially on top of curriculum demands, but I do encourage just for fun stories (and guest readers like me: yes shameless plug). I also really encourage implementing the real holidays and celebrations through centers and shared reading.

There are so many other amazing books I could suggest for October, but there will be more months and more years to come! I hope you enjoy these books and consider signing up to have me visit your classroom and share a

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1) National Poetry Day	2) Mahatma Gandhi and Nat Turner's Birthday
3)	4)	5) World Teachers' Day	6) Jazz Jennings Birthday	7)	8 Faith Ringgold's Birthday	9)
10)	11) Indigenous Peoples' Day National Coming Out Day	12)	13)	14)	15)	16)
17)	18)	19)	20)	21)	22)	23)
24)	25)	26)	27)	28 National Immigrants Day	29)	30)
31) Halloween						

BTU Organizing Committees

By Natalia Cuadra-Suez,
BTU Organizer

From fundraising hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarship funds for undocumented students to winning a full-time Ethnic Studies coach position to involving hundreds of educators and students in the Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action, our BTU organizing committees do incredible work! These committees bring BTU members and community members together to advance union priorities and win tangible improvements in our schools and our communities.

What makes an organizing committee effective and strong enough to accomplish its goals? It starts with recruiting a core group of members and leaders who can meet regularly to advance the work of the committee. Our strongest committees take the time for core members and leaders to get to know each other. This year we have committed funding to facilitate committee retreats so that we can be even more intentional about laying this crucial foundation of strong trust and relationships among committee leaders. Once a core group has been identified and brought together, the next step is to get clear on the committee's mission, vision, and goals for the year. These become the guiding light for the committee's work that help it move throughout the year with intention and purpose.

From there committees start to meet on a regular basis – many meet monthly and most elect co-chairs to set agendas and facilitate meetings. BTU staff organizers are available to assist in developing committee organizing skills like base-building (growing your base of committee members and allies), power-mapping (a visual tool for mapping out who has power and who can influence them), and



New Educators Paint Night.

campaign planning.

Whether you're a seasoned organizer or brand new to organizing, joining a BTU organizing committee can be a great way to meet like-minded people, gain a sense of community, and develop leadership skills. Are you

passionate about one of the committee issues below? Want to get involved? You can start by joining a committee email

listserv to learn more.

To join a committee listserv, email Natalia at ncuadrasaez@btu.org.

List of active organizing committees:

Restorative Justice Organizing Committee

Works to expand, improve, and support Restorative Justice policies in the district.

Unafraid Educators

Educators working to build sanctuary schools from the ground up where immigrant and undocumented students feel supported. Their work includes an annual Unafraid Educators Week of Action as well as a scholarship fund for undocumented students in BPS.

Dual Language

Educators from dual language programs sharing resources and advocating for increased supports from the district and state.

Black Lives Matter at School

A planning committee for the annual Black Lives Matter Week of Action in February.

Haitian Educators

Haitian educators and allies working to support the needs of Haitian educators, students, and parents in our schools.

Ethnic Studies Now!

The goal of this committee is to build a popular movement of people to advocate for the funding, staffing and professional training needed to develop, implement, and sustain ethnic studies in all BPS schools. It also serves to recruit and support educators to teach Ethnic Studies through providing professional development and building solidarity.

New Educators

Arranges social events and connects early-career educators with each other and with resources to help them survive and thrive through their first few years in BPS. As a union committee it also strives to identify and develop potential leaders by introducing new members to union structures and opportunities for involvement.

Housing Justice Committee

Fights for housing justice by building solidarity between BTU and City Life/Vida Urbana.

Inclusion Done Right

Fighting for fully supported and funded inclusion classrooms and for the services our students deserve.

Family Engagement

Building with BPS families to advocate for improvements related to the conditions necessary for excellent and equitable education.

To get involved with any of these committees, email Natalia at ncuadrasaez@btu.org or check out the website at: <https://btu.org/about/organizing-committees/>



Inclusion Done Right.

Great Read Alouds for October 2021...

continued from page 6

read aloud with you and your students at <https://bit.ly/readwithLea>! I am always open to book and holiday suggestions for future articles and calendars, so please feel free to share them with me at <https://bit.ly/litwithLea>! I leave you with this quote found in this year's *Planning to Change the World Planbook for Social Justice Educators*: "If collective access is revolutionary love without charity, how do we learn to love each other? How do we learn to do this love work of collective care that lifts us instead of abandons us, that

grapples with all the deep ways in which care is complicated?" Leah Lakshmi Piepzna - Samarasinha, queer disabled femme writer, organizer, performance artist, and educator spoke to me with this one! The work we do each and every day is love work, it's complicated but it's love and only made easier when we uplift one another and our students.

Wishing you all a year of collective access and revolutionary love! Happy October and happy planning and more importantly reading!



Solidarity – We Are In This Together

A good time was had by all at our Back to School Party. We had food trucks, dancing, a photobooth and plenty of comradery. Be sure to join us for future social gatherings.



BTU Raises Over \$2,200 in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk



Almost everyone has been touched by breast cancer in some way, so we've decided to make a difference by walking and raising money in the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk. The weather on Sunday, September 26th was gray and overcast but our spirits were pink and determined.

The BTU raised over \$2,200 this year in our ongoing battle against cancer. If you have yet to make a donation, please contact **Brenda Chaney** at bchaney@btu.org



Heroic Nurses' Strike at St. Vincent Hospital – Longest Strike in Massachusetts History

More than 700 members of the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) agreed to go on strike beginning March 8th, and they have heroically held their ground ever since, making this the longest strike in Massachusetts history. Their demands are centered around safe staffing ratios and better patient care, drawing attention to the deteriorating quality of healthcare for workers in Worcester and around the country. They are standing strong regarding the important demand that a nurse should not be assigned to care for more than four patients on a shift on a medical floor (*MNA Website*).

St. Vincent Hospital is owned by Tenet Healthcare Corporation, a for-profit outfit headquartered in Dallas, TX, which seeks to make billions of dollars providing substandard healthcare to patients in community hospitals around the country. In order to improve their profit margins they have endeavored to minimize hospital staff, pay low wages, and bust unions. In fact, Tenet is so determined to break the strike that they have spent over \$65 million, including \$100 an hour to pay “replacement” nurses hired specifically to break the strike. Presently, the MNA is fighting for all striking nurses to return to their positions and shifts without fear of abuse when returning to work (*Masslive*).

Tenet, the Amazon of healthcare, owns 60 hospitals and 460 other healthcare facilities. In 2020, during the pandemic, they spent over a billion dollars buying 45 Ambulatory Surgery Centers.

The greed of the Tenet bosses is deep and vicious. During the pandemic, Tenet took \$2.8 billion of taxpayers money from the CARES ACT in 2020, and then proceeded to lay off and furlough thousands of desperately needed hospital staff. In all, they managed to net \$500 million in profits since the beginning of the pandemic, while reports from hospital staff revealed that “patients suffered preventable falls and bedsores; dangerous delays in receiving medications and other treatments.” This is unconscionable at a time when hundreds of thousands of workers were losing their life to a deadly disease. Now, Tenet is boasting to its shareholders that it holds three billion in cash - ten times what it had in 2019 (*MNA Website*).

Tenet represents everything that is wrong with profit driven healthcare in the US. They consider patients, nurses and other healthcare workers' lives as *expendable*. If they are able to crush this strike, it will set a dangerous precedent for staffing ratios and quality healthcare across the state and the country.

It is important to understand that healthcare dollars, which include our tax dollars in the form of the Cares Act, are paying for nurses to cross the picket line as well as for hiring replacement nurses and their police protectors. This money was designated to fund the extra expenditures needed during the pandemic. Instead

it is being used to assault the working class, both patients and healthcare workers. Tenet would rather spend millions on police details to break the MNA nurses union rather than use that money to meet nursing demands for safer staffing. In fact, Worcester has billed Tenet \$3.1 million for police detail since the start of the strike (*Worcester Telegram*, 8/21).

Racist disparities in health care are exemplified by the conditions at St. Vincent Hospital – and thus can be generalized to understand in a larger sense racist healthcare, here in the US. The drive to improve profit margins has led to far worse outcomes and inhumane treatment for Black and Brown workers in the US and around the world. These lower standards, once implemented, are then replicated for all workers. Thus community hospitals like St. Vincent, which disproportionately serve Black, Brown and white working class patients, becomes the testing ground for ever more dangerous cost-saving measures that drag down the quality of healthcare overall, while insurance premiums skyrocket. We need to fight racism and sexism in healthcare and prioritize the lives of hospital workers and patients and not the petty greed of a handful of wealthy capitalists!

We must continue our fight for safe staffing in the schools as well as in healthcare facilities by making sure we have the nurses, social workers and teachers and all staff needed to truly meet the needs of all of our students safely. Teachers from the AFT and BTU organizers and nurses have played a supportive role in this important struggle by going out to the picket line and holding rallies. The fight for safe staffing and conditions in healthcare institutions and schools is all our struggle and our responsibility. The fight these nurses are making by not giving-in to inferior conditions needs to be a lesson for all of us. Workers and unions must stand strong and support each other in our struggles against racism and sexism and for better conditions for all workers, students, and patients.

– Heidi Winston, School Nurse, BTU Pilot School, K-8

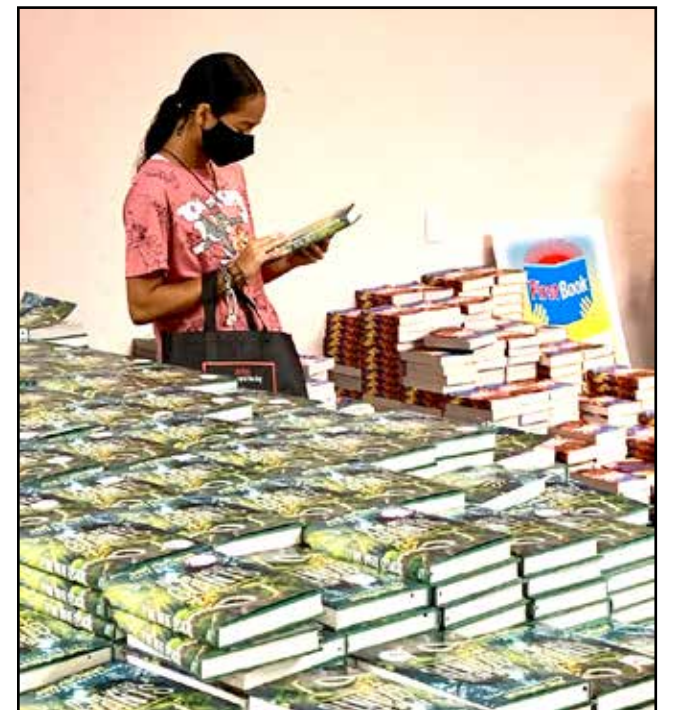


BTU's Back-to-School Book Fair A Big Success

Our annual book drive would not be possible without the support of volunteers, especially from the BTU Retired Teachers Chapter.



Community Affairs Deputy Thomas Maguire, brother of Executive Board Member and newspaper co-editor Michael Maguire, brought over donations from the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department.





BTU Members Have Different Choices in Finding Suitable Tax-Deferred Tax Plan

Most Plans Costly and Inefficient; Some Better, Research Key

By Richard Stutman

Boston Public School employees are members of the State-Boston Retirement system, which provides a pension (with medical coverage) at retirement to all vested members based on their average salary, years of service, and age at time of retirement. The pension is predictable and secure — that's the good news. The bad news is that under the current law, a pension at retirement can be expected to increase at most \$390 per year leaving your pension vulnerable to inflation in your retirement years. What should you do to save enough to give you a financial cushion in retirement? Start saving early in your career and research your options, seeking independent, outside help unless you have the time and willingness to do the research yourself. A good first step is to investigate the variety of tax-deferred options available to our members.

Advantages of Saving in a Tax-Deferred Account

Many of our members opt to save in a tax-deferred savings plan, such as the **MassSmart plan** (457b) of any one of a number of 403b (Tax-Sheltered Annuity or TSA) plans offered to BTU members. Both operate essentially along the same lines on as the better-known 401-k plan, found commonly in the private sector.

In either plan offered to our members, employee-elected contributions are withdrawn from one's paycheck and forwarded to the MassSmart plan or any one of a number of the city's approved TSA companies, where the deposited funds are invested (in funds chosen by the member) and grow on a tax-deferred basis until you retire or sooner. Early withdrawals may be subject to a financial penalty depending on the plan and your individual circumstances.

Using a tax-deferred plan is a much more efficient means of growing savings than merely depositing periodically surplus take-home dollars into an after-tax account for a few reasons: 1) Tax-deferred plans require a commitment to 'pay yourself first' as the dollars saved go straight to the savings plan instead of your pocket each payday. 2) Federal and state laws grant tax incentives to those who participate in a tax-deferred plan as a way to encourage savings.

The advantage to saving on a tax-deferred basis is twofold.

On the one hand, you're sheltering some of your money from your taxed income. For illustrative purposes, let's say one wants to save \$50 per paycheck in either of the plans. Assume the person grosses \$2,000 per paycheck for 26 checks, at an annual salary of \$52,000. Over 26 paychecks this person's contribution will amount to \$1,300. For federal and state tax purposes this person will show a taxable income of \$52,000 - \$1,300 or \$50,700.

In effect, the above teacher has "sheltered" (and then invested) the \$1,300 from federal and state taxation and will be taxed on the \$50,700, not the \$52,000. Assuming a tax bracket of 22% federal and 6% state, the \$1,300 contribution to the savings' plan in effect costs the teacher only \$936 in lost take-home pay.

On the other hand, each year the growth on the \$1,300 — whether it's the accrual of interest, stock fund growth, or whatever — will accumulate tax-deferred year after year until withdrawal.

Although in both cases, you are merely postponing taxes, not avoiding them, the process of tax-deferral works to your financial advantage by allowing what moneys would ordinarily be lost to yearly

taxation to 'work' for you by being reinvested year after year and generating income or growth themselves.

What are the Different Plans Offered?

One is the Mass Deferred Compensation or 457b plan, commonly known as the **MassSmart Plan** (<http://www.mass.gov/smartplan/>). This statewide plan, open to all state employees, is overseen by the state's treasurer and by an oversight board of financial professionals who monitor the plan to ensure that it meets its fiduciary responsibility to employees by keeping costs low and continually examining products to maintain value. The state has no financial interest in selling you this product, and MassSmart salespeople do not receive a commission.

The second type of plan is an umbrella plan under heading of IRS Code 403b, called a Tax-Sheltered Annuity or **TSA**. Under this offering, companies who wish to participate merely must file an application to do business in a municipality, and then they're free to conduct business. The plan is unmonitored and unsupervised, and the city has no responsibility for the plan's actions.

Twenty-four companies, mostly insurance, provide a 403b plan in Boston. Plan vendors employ commission-based salespeople to sell their product. The problem with having a commissioned-based salesforce is they're often incentivized to suggest a plan or fund that is in the salesperson's best financial interest, not yours. The city's sole responsibility is to transmit your dollars to the plan vendor. Should any employee have a problem with a plan vendor or a salesperson, they're left on their own to deal with it.

Both types of plans operate essentially the same way: The employee signs a contract with the plan, instructing the city (*) to withdraw a specified amount biweekly from the employee's paycheck and transmit it to the company. The employee instructs the plan operator (separate form) where to deposit their contribution, and the contributions grow tax-deferred until retirement.

* https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NCunUwqYWCb7gzV_M36-7kOO5tqdPd/view

Decisions, Decisions...

In signing up to participate in a tax-deferred savings plan, plan members have a number of decisions to make. You are strongly advised to seek advice from a financial professional who has no financial interest in your decision *before* signing up for any plan and/or making any investment choices. Your decisions to make:

- **How much should you invest from each paycheck?**
- **What type of plan to participate in, a 403b or the 457?**
- **Where to place your money within the plan itself?**

How much should you invest is an individual decision. Advice is to start low and see how you manage your expenses

	Plan Structure	Stock Index Fund Annual Growth w/o Fees	Typical Fees	Net Return	Monthly Dep.	Duration	Gross Deposits	Value After 30 yrs.
A	MassSmart	9%	.02%	8.98%	\$100	30 yrs.	\$36,000	\$182,313
B	Typical 403b	9%	1.52%	7.48%	\$100.	30 yrs.	\$36,000	\$134,206

given the new deduction. The MassSmart plan allows a paycheck deduction of \$10 per pay period or 1% of your paycheck, whichever is lower. Individual TSAs set their own minimum contributions. Withdrawal amounts can always be changed.

Remember that if you are setting aside, say, \$50 from your biweekly paycheck, it's taken out pre-tax, without being taxed at the state and federal levels, you'll notice a difference of approximately \$36 in your take-home pay. Another way to look at this, it's costing you only \$36 to purchase an investment that is worth \$50.

What type of plan to participate in, a 403b or the 457?

Now comes the hard part: Choosing which plan to join. Before you choose, again, you are strongly advised to contact a financial professional or to do your own research.

Both plans (MassSmart and 403b) offer the same wide array of savings vehicles: stock funds, bond funds, hybrid funds, fixed (CD-like) funds, and so on. That's where their similarities end. There are key differences between plans: transparency, ease of access, costs, choice, penalties for withdrawal (*surrender* fees) from one plan to another, and annual charges. Before signing up for any plan, know what you're signing up for. Fees matter greatly.

In the **MassSmart plan**, fees are used solely to manage your money once invested. The fees are negotiated by the state and kept in check by a variety of independent financial watchdogs. The fees are very low. Plan reps from MassSmart do not work on commission and have no financial incentive to upsell. Up-to-date plan or fund information is readily accessible and plan choice is broad.

One disadvantage is it is very difficult to obtain a loan from your account. TSAs generally offer loans, but it varies by company.

In a **TSA or a 403b** fees include the same management costs but are padded by a number of insurance costs (mortality and expense fees, riders) that can drain an additional 1.25% to 1.75% or more per year on average from your account balance.

What's more, most TSA companies tack on a 'surrender fee' should you wish

person who stands to lose a commission if, for example, you want to move your funds out of an inferior company to a better opportunity. That's why most TSAs attach a surrender charge to your account, which deducts a healthy fee (1% to 7%, depending on when the funds were deposited) if you want to move your funds from one TSA to another. The salesperson's commission generally comes out of the surrender charge — which is why return phone calls from salespeople on this issue often are slow to come.

Even Small Fees Add Up!

Consider two people, "A" and "B," who have a savings plan, one with MassSmart and the other with a standard 403.b that has additional fees that drain 1.5% annually from your account. Both start investing \$50 per paycheck for 30 years and use the same stock index fund (<https://investor.vanguard.com/index-funds/what-is-an-index-fund>), which has grown an average of 9% (before fee deductions), over the duration. The difference between A's growth and B's growth is below:

(The example at the top of the page is for illustrative purposes only, and it shows the difference in fund value over 30 years in two competing, identical investments — one in the TSA with its typical fee structure, and one in the MassSmart plan, also with its typical fee structure.)

By investing in the low-cost MassSmart "A" will accumulate \$48,000 more than if they had invested in the 403b plan. 1.5% may not seem like much, but after 30 years of compounding, it adds up. The message: Make sure to get information about fees.

Tracking Down Fee Structure Can be Difficult

It is difficult to track down the cost of fees in some of the city's 403b offerings. Consider AXA, for example, one of the more popular offered in the city:

Equitable (AXA) has a number of variable annuity families it markets throughout the country, including Boston. Its fees are high. And since the city has no obligation to help you uncover their fees, and they're not easy to obtain, we have listed a few below from Equitable (AXA) to show the wide range of charges.

<https://smartsaset.com/retirement/axa-annuities-review>

Equitable (AXA) Plan Subgroups	Series	In Addition, Annual Cost to Manage Funds
Investor Edge	Series A	Annual fee ranges from 1.68% to 4.99% (of total fund value)
Retirement Cornerstone	Series B	From 1.88% to 3.67%
Structured Capital	Series C	From 2.23% to 2.36%

to withdraw funds or move funds over to another savings vehicle. (Surrender fees can run anywhere up to 15 years, though most run 6-10 years.)

Finally, on the issue of transparency and access to information, there are huge differences between the MassSmart Plan and most TSAs. Most TSAs are commissioned-based, and it's not always easy to get objective information from a sales-

Not all TSAs are Created Equal

All 403B companies are not created equal. Some companies (*) offered in Boston are better than others. Some are worse. Many of the companies are primarily insurance companies, and their plan offering includes mandatory

insurance-added products or riders that contain excessive fees. Most people don't need the expensive insurance add-ons and certainly don't want to pay for them. But before you make that decision, you have to understand the company's fee structure. *First question to ask anyone trying to sell you a TSA: "What is your mortality and expense fee?"* That fee alone decreases your account balance roughly 1.25% to 1.5% per year.

One popular Boston TSA offering, Fidelity (1-800-343-0860), is not primarily an insurance company and has a 403b plan that doesn't require any unnecessary insurance costs. Other TSAs may offer similar products as well, though they're difficult to uncover.

See a complete list here of city-allowed TSA companies as well as the application to start withdrawals here:

<http://bostonpublicschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=3178>

Be Wary of TSA Salespeople Soliciting Business in Our Schools

For years, our members complained about TSA insurance vendors roaming our hallways, visiting our teachers' rooms, and coming (unsolicited) into our classrooms. They were seen by and large as an unwelcome interruption in our place of work, so the BTU negotiated language with the school district to set some ground rules prohibiting their unregulated access to our school buildings.

The district policy is very explicit: Insurance vendors, TSA representatives and the like are allowed to stay in the building's main school office ONLY. Here's the citywide policy:

"Any vendors seeking to solicit business from teachers or sell products to teachers shall remain in the main office and shall be prohibited from entering teacher's rooms or teacher lounges."

MassSmart is an approved statewide plan, not a TSA insurance company; its representatives are not commission-based and are allowed in our buildings. To contact MassSmart for general information, write here, SMART@Empower-Retirement.com. The Boston representative, Marianne Cole, can be reached at Marianne.Cole@empower-retirement.com. To sign up for a TSA, see the list here (*) and find the application there as well.

* <http://bostonpublicschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=3178>

One overarching point to make about TSA plan representatives and their companies: Neither they nor their company has any special imprimatur from the city, i.e., they're approved to do business, but the city is not endorsing their product. Companies are not screened, represen-

tatives may or may not have a financial background, and representatives are under no fiduciary obligation to act in the employee's best interest. Nationally, there is a movement to revamp the law to mandate that municipalities take some responsibility for overseeing TSAs sold in their jurisdiction, in much the same way private companies that offer a 401k have responsibility for their plan.

Where to place your money within the plan itself?

This is arguably the most difficult part of the planning process, and we not allowed to make any investment recommendations along these lines.

All of the plans offer an array of investment vehicles: stock funds, bond funds, stable value funds. Before making any decisions when investing, the reader is

advised to consult a financial professional who doesn't have any monetary stake in the decision you make. If you have this expertise, fine. If you don't, find someone who does. Any investment choices you make can have a lifetime consequence, so please research your options carefully.

A couple of places to start to get a general understanding of investing in either a TSA or the MassSmart Plan.

Check out Vanguard's webpage: <https://investor.vanguard.com/investing/investor-education>

403b wise website is very useful: <https://403bwise.org/>,

The information above is offered because both TSAs and the MassSmart Deferred Compensation Plan (457b) provide a great tax benefit to our members. The information touches on many of the benefits of having a 403b or a 457b Plan, but it is not meant to be all-inclu-

sive. Much of the remaining information can be found easily, and I'd suggest first going here, <https://403bwise.org/education>, to get an overview.

Although we cannot give investment advice, we can do have an opinion as to where to begin. Two plans, either the MassSmart or the Fidelity 403b, have advantages that most of the other plans do not have: Fund choice is good, costs are low, fees are insignificant, information is easily accessible, and most independent financial advisors will be aware of them. Other plan choices, many of them with high fees, have features that will put your savings accrual at a disadvantage.

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

(Richard Stutman, rstutman@btu.org is the Past President of the BTU, 2003-2017 and Secondary Field Rep, 1983-2003.)

On Sunday, October 3rd, the Roslindale Day Parade resumed after having been paused due to COVID. Several Boston Public Schools participated in the festivities. Participating were the Sumner, the Curley, the Mozart, the Philbrick, Boston Latin Academy, and Boston Latin School.



AUGUST 14, 2021 EARTHQUAKE

DONATE TO HELP HAITI

2021 MASS HAITIAN RELIEF TASK FORCE

HAUinc.org/helphaiti

Organized by HAU, AFAB-KAFANM, and many partners.

On Saturday, August 14th, following the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti, the Association of Haitian Women in Boston (AFAB), the Haitian Americans United, Inc. (HAU), and other partner organizations joined forces to form the 2021 Mass Haitian Relief task.

To support our brothers and sisters affected by the earthquake, We have already sent donations directly to grassroots organizations on the ground in Haiti, serving those in immediate need. Our goal is to raise \$50,000 to continue this community-led relief effort.

We invite you to contribute by:

1. Making an online donation at HAUinc.org/helphaiti;
2. Dropping off a check at AFAB (330 Fuller Street, Dorchester, MA 02121) written to "Haitian Americans United";
3. Sending a check directly to "Haitian Americans United" at P.O. Box 260440, Mattapan, MA 02126 (memo: "Haiti August 2021 Earthquake")
4. Making a deposit at East Boston Savings Bank: Account # 07-774-15001.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

–Heidi Winston,
Nurse, BTU Pilot School

White Fragility: The Secondhand Smoke of Racism in Public Education

Education is really a caste system and all children suffer from it

By Edith Bazile, as first appeared in *Schoolyard News*

“Politeness as filtered through fragility and supremacy isn’t about manners. It’s about a methodology of controlling the conversation.”

– Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Woman that a Movement Forgot*

How to fix the dysfunction in public education

To change the dysfunction in public education requires assessing and transforming policies, not students, and dismantling structures of anti-Black racism. White people are insulated from the impact of racialized schooling practices



Today, American public education is a caste system empowered by policies that push Black students to the bottom.

A history of Black efforts to educate Black children

During this nation’s history of enslavement, laws were enacted making it illegal for Black people to learn to read. We learned anyway. In the late 1800s, during the Reconstruction era, Black students were denied access to schooling. Black educators opened schools and provided high-quality education, which led to the economic independence of many thriving black businesses and communities.

According to historian Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker, “it was common for whites to believe [Black people] were undeserving of schools.” During this era, Black citizens were forced to pay higher taxes, which essentially covered the cost of the education of white students. Jim Crow emerged during reconstruction. Mobs of enraged white supremacists, Ku Klux Klan, and white government officials destroyed many thriving black communities and massacred Black people across the country.

The downside of desegregation

When Jim Crow segregation in public education ended, black schools were forced to close and Black teachers’ unions were required to disband. Black educators were rarely hired in the desegregated schools, leaving Black students to be educated by a majority white teaching force. In the aftermath of desegregation, Black students lost access to the high-quality strong network of dedicated Black educators.

In 2021, Black students continue to face barriers accessing high-quality education, and the shortage of Black teachers persists in America’s schools. The conversation must center on school policies that block Black students from success and perpetuate the chronic shortage of Black educators.

that negatively impact Black students, and there is limited teacher preparation that addresses this historical content.

Public education is dominated by white educators; engaging white educators in discussions about structural racism in schools is necessary.



Robin DeAngelo

Robin DeAngelo states that conversations about race trigger white fragility in the form of silence, defensiveness, or anger. She states white people may protest, hijack the conversation, or demand others soothe their discomfort. DeAngelo explains, “The simplistic idea that racism is limited to individual intentional acts committed by unkind people is at the root of virtually all white defensiveness on this topic.”

White fragility is not racism, but it promotes racism by denying the reality of white dominant culture and its pervasive structures that are rooted in anti-Blackness.

White fragility is not the same as white supremacy and differs from white privilege. White supremacy is the false belief that individuals are superior based on skin color, and white privilege refers to the unfair societal advantages white people have over their non-white peers. White fragility shows up as staunch defensiveness: angry, hurt, wounded feelings or even an outright dismissal or rejection of the existence or evidence of racism in schools.



Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

“Weaponized weakness”

When discussing white fragility, DeAngelo explains, “Think of it as a weaponized weakness. Weaponized tears, weaponized hurt feelings. The weakness is just in how little it takes to trigger it. But the impact is not weak at all. It’s a powerful means of white racial control.”

When Black people call out the oppressive effects we suffer from systemic racism, we are often targeted as the problem, the troublemakers.

bell hooks states, “Shaming is one of the deepest tools of imperialist, white supremacist, capital patriarchy because shame produces trauma and trauma often produces paralysis.”



Edith Bazile when she was a 13-year-old BPS student.



bell hooks

Public attacks against Black people who expose systemic racism are not rooted in factual disagreements; they are intended to isolate and silence us.

These personal attacks are a form of gaslighting. They are coded in unflattering language or stereotypical code words/phrases, such as passionate, angry, ranting, and shockingly dramatic. We may even be accused of stirring up racial vitriol for calling out systemic racism.

Robin DeAngelo states, “Today we have a cultural norm that insists we hide our racism from people of color and deny it among ourselves, but not that we actually challenge it. In fact, we are socially penalized for challenging racism.”

These deflections are also intended to center whiteness. Centering whiteness has its historical roots in this country going back to the kidnapping and forced enslavement of African people.

What I learned in school

In my early schooling, I was taught that the enslavement of Black people was justified because we were saved from our miserable existence and brought to this country to be civilized. In other words, enslavement was done for our own good. White people were centered as paternalistic, altruistic with good intentions. Racism is historically rooted in this anti-Black rhetoric, which was constructed to justify enslavement and deny our humanity. Those who study history understand how deeply anti-Blackness resides in the American psyche.

Centering Blackness is necessary when discussing racial inequity, injustice, white privilege, and the deep wound of systemic racism that historically pushes Black students to the bottom of the racial hierarchy in public education. During these discussions, white fragility often shows up in the form of defensiveness coupled with deflections to shift the narrative to re-center whiteness. Why? White fragility often demands people of color give comfort to white educators when the real focus should be on dismantling racist institutional policies, rules, and structures.

The conversation is not about white people

Carly Simon sang, “You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you, don’t you, don’t you, don’t you?” Exposing systemic racism is not just about what one does individually; it is about the hardwired, systemic set of policies, rules, procedures, and practices that impact a racial group, specifically Black people.

When Black people center Blackness and expose racist structures, white people should resist inserting themselves in the conversation and instead listen. This conversation is not about you; it is about Black people and what we experience.

When white people demand the focus shift from institutional policies, rules, and practices, it showcases white fragility when it comes to topics about race. Ironically, the mask of white privilege is amplified by the desire to be acknowledged as allies. But ultimately, Black students are blamed for failure because there is a refusal to acknowledge that racism is at a crisis level due to policies rooted in anti-Blackness.

Viewing Black children from a deficit lens

White fragility is designed to protect and defend white dominant culture at all costs. It is rooted in viewing Black students from a deficit lens, a fixed mindset.

When white fragility is weaponized in schools, Black students are perceived as prone to permanently suffer in this world unless white saviors intervene to hold their hands, wipe their tears, and rescue them from their desperate, impoverished conditions. This form of fake wokeness also seeks to give students a family-centered school environment that Black students are perceived to lack. They are taken to the theater or museum so they can experience some good ole white culture, but they are not provided strong curriculum that results in academic excellence.

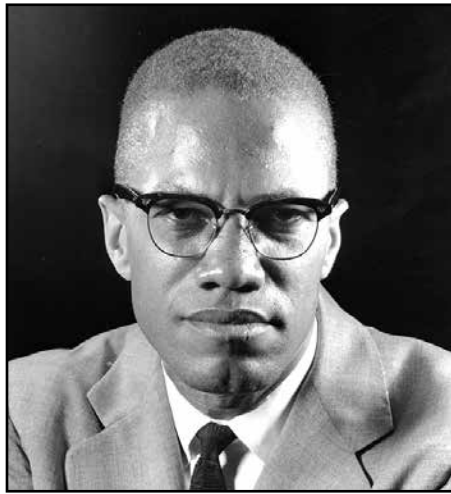
This was my indoctrination process into white supremacy culture as a student and teacher so many decades ago, and sadly it continues today. Instead of empowering Black students’ multiple literacies, these approaches are rooted in cultural erasure.

The T-shirt is not enough

Racial equity cannot be achieved simply by wearing Black Lives Matter T-shirts, hugging it out, fist bumping, or shedding tears over racism. Black people do not need a pity party with a white-centered theme of saviorhood. Racism is not about your windows; it is about mirrors. It is about educating yourself because you can’t be an anti-racist if you don’t know the history of racism.

Through the forced labor of enslavement, Black people built the economic foundation of this country and contributed greatly to daily comforts experienced today, but our incredible contributions and achievements are absent from curricula content.

Malcolm X states, “I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people, and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight.”



Malcolm X

The value of Black educators who founded black schools during and after Reconstruction led to independent flourishing black neighborhoods in Tulsa, Oklahoma (known as Black Wall Street); Hyti District, Durham, North Carolina (known as the Black capital of the South); Harlem, NY (known as the Black Mecca); U Street in Washington, DC (known as Black Broadway); Sweet Auburn Historical District, Atlanta, GA (dubbed the richest Negro street in the world); Jackson Ward, Richmond, Virginia (known as Harlem of the South); Seventh Street, Oakland, CA (known as the cultural hub for Black entrepreneurs); and countless others that exemplified black excellence.

Black researchers ranging from Dr. Carter G. Woodson in the 1930s to Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Adrienne Dixson, Pedro Noguera, Christopher Emdin, James A. Banks, and Adrienne Dixson affirm the importance of Black educators. A recent John Hopkins study reinforced the critical value of Black educators for all students.

Black educators provide value in the classrooms but must be at the policy table making policy decisions. The benefits for Black students range from reductions in suspensions and expulsions to significant increases in enrollment in advanced academic programs, graduation rates, and college entry.

Why there aren’t enough Black teachers

She had applied a year earlier after graduating from Northeastern University but was not hired. The Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts (BEAM) and others strongly advocated that Boston Public Schools stop the hiring discrimination against Black applicants, and the next time she applied, she got the job.

Yet public education has not embraced the value of Black educators. Why? The shortage of Black teachers begins with the mistreatment and miseducation of Black students in schools, which negatively impacts Black students’ desire to pursue the field of education. To fill the demand for Black educators, public education must end anti-Black discrimination in the teaching and hiring practice. Districts must decolonize school cultures, the curriculum, classroom spaces, and routines. Research supports Black educators leading this work on behalf of all students and staff.

Centering Blackness is not a threat; it is necessary to center the voices of Black people when discussing racial equity and justice. Equity means acknowledging our full humanity in a society where justice is centered.



Edith Bazile as a new teacher at Dorchester High School, September 1979.

Whataboutism

We must examine why conversations about systemic racism make some engage in circular discussions that fall into the rabbit hole of whataboutisms. In a whataboutism response to systemic racism, there is a counter-accusation or a separate issue raised. Whataboutery is a series of deliberate deflections including personal attacks to avoid addressing the deep harm of systemic structures of racism in public education. In using whataboutisms, “White fragility functions as a form of bullying; I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me—no matter how diplomatically you try to do so—that you will simply back off, give up, and never raise the issue again” says Robin DeAngelo.

White fragility is an unwillingness to seriously study the history of racism and to reflect on the current prevailing structures and how these structures impact Black students.



James Baldwin

As James Baldwin states, “If one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question...the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected—those, precisely, who need the law’s protection most!—and listens to their testimony.” But, that’s not how white fragility works.

bell hooks states, “The rage of the oppressed is never the same as the rage of the privileged.” It is a privilege to engage in discussions about structural racism rather than experience its traumatizing effects as Black people do.

It is important to develop an awareness of systemic racism and discern actions that uphold systemic racism versus actions that disrupt systemic structures of racism. Critical race theory is a set of educational strategies that analyzes historical patterns of racism, privilege, and power, and targets solutions while centering those who have been left out. CRT should be embedded in professional development to help understand actions that lead to educational justice. In the words of bell hooks, “true resistance begins with people confronting pain... and wanting to do something to change it.”

We must recognize how white fragility shows up in conversations about race. According to DeAngelo, “The key to moving forward is what we do with our discomfort. We can use it as a door out—blame the messenger and disregard the message. Or we can use it as a door in by asking, “Why does this unsettle me? What would it mean for me if this were true?”

There must be the social, economic, and political will to acknowledge that racial gaps are imposed by policy decisions and change school policies rooted in anti-Black racism. In the words of Ijeoma Oluo, “You have to get over the fear of facing the worst in yourself. You should instead fear unexamined racism. Fear the thought that right now, you could be contributing to the oppression of others and you don’t know it. But do not fear those who bring that oppression to light. Do not fear the opportunity to do better.”



Edith Bazile

(Edith Bazile is a former BPS special educator and administrator and former President of Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts (BEAM). Edith Bazile was a presenter at the 2021 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, presidential session, Power and Possibilities Series featuring “Educators as Advocates for Justice in Education.” She works as a consultant with Collaborative for Educational Services and DYS’ Special Education in Institutional Settings.)



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