As we delve 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 of action unexpectedly upended or impacted by changes far beyond your control? "You must trust in the circumstances in 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 more divided and continues to polarize even further? 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 to me in 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" Exploring 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 crisis. 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 we make assumptions that our intentions become even more difficult to maintain. When we are also often isolated from each other and unable to interact in the ways we 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 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 progress. 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 are trying to understand the real historical, systemic 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 some of the most well-known. It has something to learn. And just as our students need specific environ-ment and condi-tions 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 new language but might be afraid to make mistakes, adults often need to be in a safe space to speak and learn. 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 we go 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 what we are fighting for in our master contract; through our racial justice committee; through our conferences and professional development opportunities; but perhaps, most importantly; through individual conversations. 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 from both 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 produc- tive way instead of just reacting.

• Know what you don’t know. Just because you have not experienced something does not mean some- one 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, unnecessarily uncomfortable enough that you are learning outside of your comfort zone?
Meet the New Co-Editor of the Boston Union Teacher, Anne Slater

The Peer-to-Peer column was formed through big ideas 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 talking with others 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 shared, through the lens 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 district.

IIS 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 and despite 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 students in the way that teachers mentor 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 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 listeners by getting more of the membership to submit their stories to the paper.

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 to speak his mind. 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!

Be Water: Power, Unity, Flexibility and Strength…

continued from page 1

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 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 everything that he taught and everyone student, and 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!

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.

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Hilarious.
Know Your Rights

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

Caren Carew
BTU Secondary Field Representative

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, which includes, but is not limited to, face shields, gloves, and aprons. When BPS learns of a change in the location or type of masks due to the coronavirus, all staff will be informed.

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, which includes, but is not limited to, face shields, gloves, and aprons.

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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 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 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 ⅔ vote by the COPE Committee members. Next, the E-Board receives the recommendation and reviews information about the candidates. A vote is then held by the E-Board members to decide whether the candidate should be recommended to the membership. Again a ⅔ vote is required. Lastly, a vote is held at the BTU monthly membership meetings during which members have the chance to approve or oppose candidates. A ⅔ vote is again required to pass.

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 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 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 jmccinnis@btu.org or Political Organizer Roberto Jimenez at rjimenez@btu.org.
Great Read Alouds for October 2021

I f you’ve ever paid attention to any Mas-achusetts fall meme then you’ll know we are known for pumpkins, ugs, 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. How- ever, 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 divers- ity, 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 wayyyyyyyyy 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 cal- endars are still saying Columbus Day or “State Holiday.” We need to tell the truth about Indigenous People Day and cele- brate 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 tell- ing 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 grand- mother so I tend to fall in love with any book that depicts that special grand- mother/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 defi- nitely do not want that. However, I do think this story tells some history of the dreamcatcher beautifully while light- 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 implementing the real holi- days 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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Great Read Alouds for October 2021…

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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/readwithLea. I leave you with this quote found in this year’s Planning to Change the World Plannerbook 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 abandoning 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!

**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/
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.
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 endeavoured 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, 8/22).

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 health care 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.
By Richard Stutman

**Boston Public School employees are members of the State-Boston Retirement System (State-Boston), which provides members with retirement benefits. ASU members (Mass Smart) receive contributions. A Mass Deferred Compensation Account (MDC) plan is available to all 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 companies, (Annuity or TSA) plans offered to TU members. Both operate essentially along the same lines as on the better-known 401k plan, found commonly in the private sector.

In either plan offered to our members, employee-elected contributions are withdrawn from one paycheck and forwarded to the MassSmart plan or any one of a number of the city's approved TSA or 403b (Retirement Annuity or Tax Sheltered Annuity) companies, where the deposited moneys are withdrawn from one's paycheck and forwarded to the MassSmart plan or any other tax-sheltered plan.

**What are the Different Plans Offered?**

In effect, the above teacher has "shelved" the plan (457b) to show the wide range of options available to members.

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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 force 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”)

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.

Todays 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 underserving 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.

White fragility is not racism, but it triggers 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.

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

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 unkinked 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.

Because 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 racist 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.

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 and supremacy isn’t about manners. It’s about a methodology of controlling the conversation.”

— Miki Kendal, Hood Feminism: Notes from the Woman that a Movement Forgot
The conversation is not about white people

Carlos 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 hardened, 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 would 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 savors intervene to hold their hands, wipe their tears, and rescue them from their desperate, impoverished conditions. This form of false weakness 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 the white culture first hand, but 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, fast bumping, or shedding tears over racism. Black people do not need a pity party with a white-centered theme of savoirfroid. 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.”

The value of Black educators who founded Black schools during and after Reconstruction led to independent flourishing Black neighborhoods in Black, Oklahoman (known as Black Wall Street); Hyatt 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 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 Emidu, 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 mistrust and discrimination 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 practices.

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.

Whataboutism

We must examine why conversations about systemic racism make some engage in circular dialogues 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. Whataboutism 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 whataboutism, “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.

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 Jhonna Oluno, “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.”