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President's Report Jessica J. Tang

WELCOME 2021

A New Year With New Hopes!

As we all say goodbye to 2020 — a year for the history books — we gladly welcome in 2021! It is a new year that will undoubtedly also have its own challenges, but with a new administration in DC with new opportunities to begin the healing process and undo the harms of 2020 and the prior four years. There is much hope that the worst of the pandemic may be over and that there is a better way forward.

The hope comes in the form of vaccines for health care workers and, soon, educators and school-based staff as well. But also in the hope that comes with a new federal administration, Secretary of Education, and Secretary of Labor.

The policies and laws that might be enacted, and the relief that hopefully is on the horizon, depends much on the outcomes of the Georgia Senate races. That is why our members, and union members across the nation have been engaged in supporting the Democratic Senate candidates in Georgia who support public education, support labor and support the values we believe in. 2020 has made abundantly clear that the elected political leaders of our government make not just decisions that impact schools and education, but health, housing and a myriad of other issues.

The impact of political policy can be felt from the federal level down to each household. The COVID-19 relief bills decided whether or not school districts

had funding to adequately upgrade antiquated and obsolete facilities. It also decided for how long educators could continue to count on the Family First Coronavirus Act to take leaves for child care or health reasons. That bill expired December 31, 2020. The relief bills were the difference between a family getting evicted or being able to pay rent; to have to choose work, and risk their health and life, or pay for food and housing.

The damage of the last four years is far from over. Unfriendly immigration policies as well as the pandemic has led to a decrease in enrollment of Boston Public Schools. This will affect budgets and could lead to potential layoffs or reductions in force. The lack of funding to get rapid testing for educators and students as well as adequate ventilation in schools delayed the district's ability to bring students back in person. There is a dire need for compensatory services for our special needs students and a lack of guidance and regulations to decrease community spread of the virus while also helping suffering businesses are actually all connected.

While it is often uncomfortable for many of our BTU educators to get involved in politics, (we didn't pursue careers in education in order to get involved in politics) the politics absolutely determine what we do every day. Do we have the resources to do our jobs every day? Will the stress from teaching in underfunded schools affect our

health? That is why the political action work we get involved in is absolutely necessary. That is why we ask for COPE contributions, we endorse candidates, and then organize and mobilize to get them elected.

Public education is political. There is simply no way to avoid the conversation. We get involved to put our words to action and truly use our collective union power to advocate for what educators and retirees need to be healthy and secure. And because it's not just about us, we get involved for our students, families and all the community to be healthy, secure and cared for as well. The belief that working people deserve security, stability, equity and the ability to meet their basic needs is what the labor movement was founded on and that is what we fight for and will continue to fight for. That includes the political fight because the decisions our political leaders make determines our reality every day.

As we welcome in 2021, we have the opportunity, with new leaders and a new administration to hopefully get a new deal--not just across the nation, but locally, too. We must fight nationally so that locally, we have what we need and deserve for our students, educators and families. Our fight in BPS for Safety, Equity and Transparency as schools continue to reopen and we address the disparities that have always existed, is the same fight that our brothers, sister and sibling locals all across the nation are



Jessica J. Tang
 BTU President

fighting for. And always, when we fight together, we are stronger and better and we will continue to advocate and stand in solidarity not just with our sister locals in Massachusetts, but beyond as well.

This year, there will be challenges. The hard work still lies ahead. And there will, as always, be forces that try to divide us — within our union, within our schools, within our communities — and we must be prepared to resist those divisions and not turn on each other, but turn to each other to remember our common goals, values and humanity as we tackle the work ahead and work through the hard conversations and dialogue.

While there will always be challenges and fights, in this new year there is also hope that we can continue to push the "arc of justice" as Martin Luther King Jr. described, in the right direction. If we truly believe in the values of social, racial and economic justice that the labor movement and public education movement has embraced, not only can we continue to bend that arc, we must. And we will do so together.

Happy New Year and welcome 2021! We are ready for you.

"The Purpose of Education" by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Morehouse College Student Paper, The Maroon Tiger, in 1947
 As I engage in the so-called "bull sessions" around and about the school, I too often find that most college men have a misconception of the purpose of education. Most of the "brethren" think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with noble ends rather than means to an end.

It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968)

Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think incisively and to think for one's

majority of the so-called educated people do not think logically and scientifically. Even the press, the classroom, the plat-

form, and the pulpit in many instances do not give us objective and unbiased truths. To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.

The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.

The late Eugene Talmadge, in my opinion, possessed one of the better minds of Georgia, or even America.

(continued on page 2)

Pandemic Inequality

The past year has exposed the systemic injustices that are inherent in America. African-American, Latinos, and Native Americans are four times as likely as whites to be hospitalized with COVID and almost three times as likely to die. These jarring statistics can be directly linked to the economic and social injustices of our system.

diseases are much higher in low income communities. These comorbidities have contributed to the increased rates of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID we are seeing in black and brown communities.

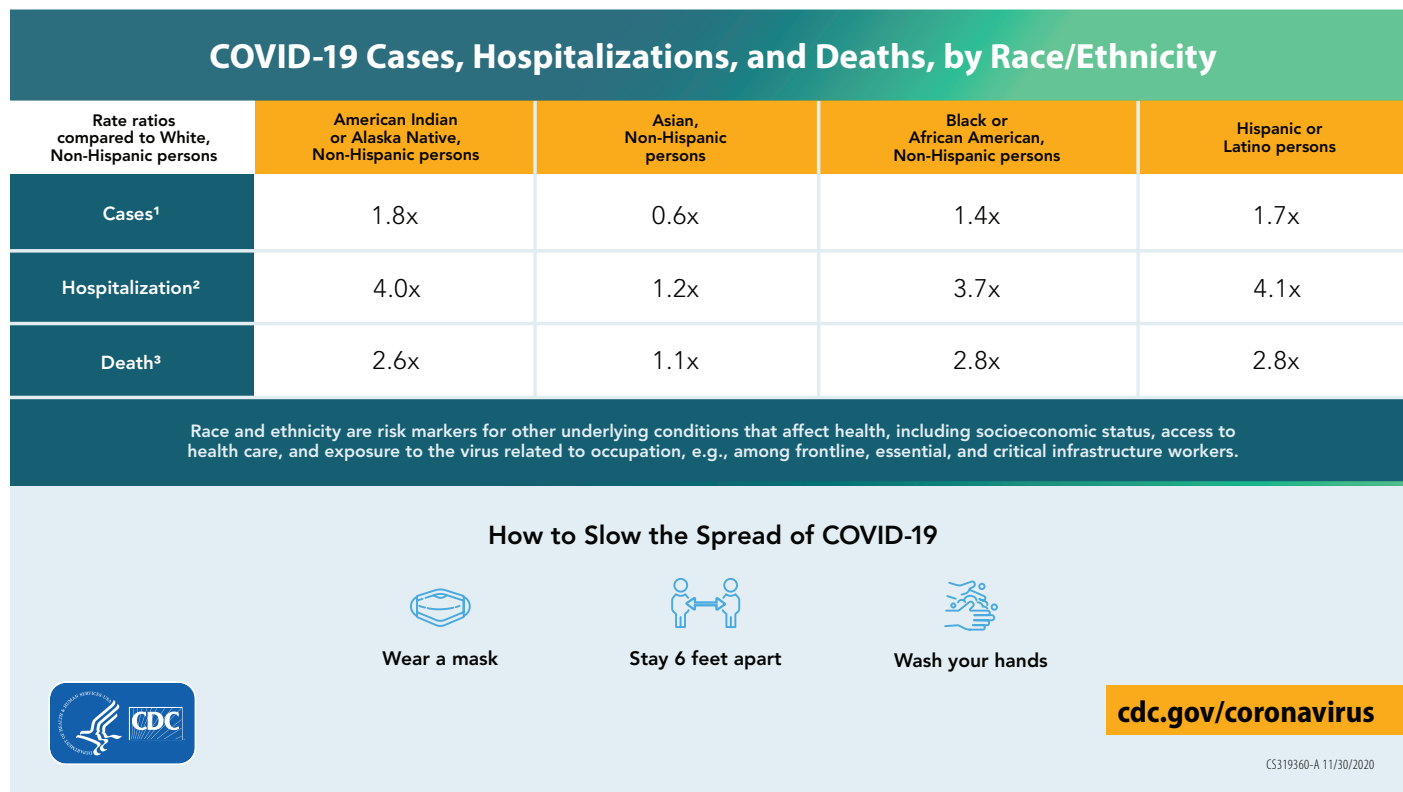
During the Gilded Age of American capitalism in the late 1880's we saw comparable inequality. This led to

it on workers.

After the first initial shutdown of the country the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Securities (CARES) Act was passed in late March staving off a collapse of the system. Since that time it has been ignore, ignore, and ignore from **Mitch McConnell** and the Republicans. It was like pulling teeth to get a second



Garret Virchick
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor



The sickness and death are not the only disparities laid bare by this global pandemic. As teachers we have been well aware of the underfunding of public education. The lack of investment in school infrastructure has made it impossible to keep staff and students safe from this highly infectious disease. In NYC alone 72 employees have lost their lives to COVID. The list of educators who we've lost across the country grows every day.

As cases rose in Massachusetts, what did Governor **Charlie Baker** do? Rather than close schools he changed the metrics by which communities are ranked high risk. Was this due to pressure from the business community? In this country workers can be replaced like so many widgets. They would rather risk the lives of teachers, students, and families than risk the loss of profit when employees need to stay home with their children.

This system does not take the needs of people into account. Profit is first and last. In the beginning of the pandemic the frontline workers in America's hospitals could not get enough personal protective equipment. The system was not prepared. Hospitals, like every industry, have been set up to maximize profits. Why have too much on hand? Have just enough so the bottom line is not affected this quarter. As a result it took months to mobilize industry to produce more, contributing to the deaths of doctors, nurses, and hospital staff charged with keeping the rest of us healthy.

Not just medical workers, all essential workers are at risk of contracting coronavirus. And if you are a person of color you are more likely to be in one of these face to face occupations. Many of these are low wage occupations. When you live paycheck to paycheck you are more likely to go to work when you are sick, potentially putting co-workers at risk as well. High wage workers and professionals, on the other hand, are more likely than not to be in a job that can be done remotely.

Wage inequality also means lower health inequalities. Obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary

struggles by American workers for increased wages and better working conditions. This struggle created the American middle class that probably reached its peak in the 1970s. But ever since the profit crisis of the late 70's, and then the Reagan ideology of less taxes and less government, we have seen an ever expanding wealth gap and the decreased standard of living for the working class and people of color.

This conservative ideology of less government, and with it less government regulation, has also contributed to pandemic inequality. Early in the pandemic Trump ordered meat packing plants to stay open citing the Defense Production Act. As of April 21st, the Smithfield meat packing plant of Sioux Falls, South Dakota had reported 904 cases and two deaths from COVID. On April 22nd, the Centers for Disease Control issued a report with basic health recommendations to control the spread of the novel coronavirus at the plant. But the report was withdrawn and rewritten with watered down language to make it easier for Smithfield to stay open, purportedly due to pressure from the Trump administration. The profits of the wealthy take precedence over the lives of workers, and in this case many immigrant workers of color.

We only need a brief recap of Trump's disastrous response to the pandemic. Deny, deny, deny. This has fit in nicely with the Republican response to the crisis who also share that view when it comes to relief for the American people. Deficit spending is a no-no if it means spending

relief package passed in late December. Huge compromises were needed just to get it passed with zero aid for states. It did not matter that cars lined up at food pantries across the country. It was only the two runoff elections in Georgia, and the threat of losing control of the Senate, that moved McConnell.

But of course, the relief checks will be arriving late. After his administration signed off on the bill President Trump decided to enter the negotiations **AFTER** it passed both houses and threatened

a veto. Hoping to feed his ego one last time he demanded larger checks, with of course his narcissistic signature to go on each of them. Of course, **Nancy Pelosi** and the Democrats wanted a larger package from the very beginning. But let-them-eat-cake McConnell kept the Republican caucus in line and Trump finally signed off.

As we start the process of vaccination that will hopefully lead us out of the pandemic we cannot go back to the way things were. It should be apparent that this system is not working for the vast majority of Americans. The wounds of class and racial inequalities have been laid bare in America. The mantra of Black Lives Matter must be our demand in all aspects of our society.

Free market capitalism has shown itself to be a failure for all but a very few during this pandemic. The richest billionaires like **Jeff Bezos** and **Elon Musk** have added almost a trillion dollars of wealth during the pandemic. In October, the *New York Times* estimated that more than eight million Americans have slipped into poverty since the virus caused the first shutdown. Other estimates have over one hundred million more people into extreme poverty worldwide.

The rich ignored the science and people died. With another global disaster in climate change on the horizon it is incumbent on us to find another way. The future of humanity is at stake.

"The Purpose of Education"...

(continued from page 1)

Moreover, he wore the Phi Beta Kappa key. By all measuring rods, Mr. Talmadge could think critically and intensively; yet he contends that I am an inferior being. Are those the types of men we call educated?

We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration,

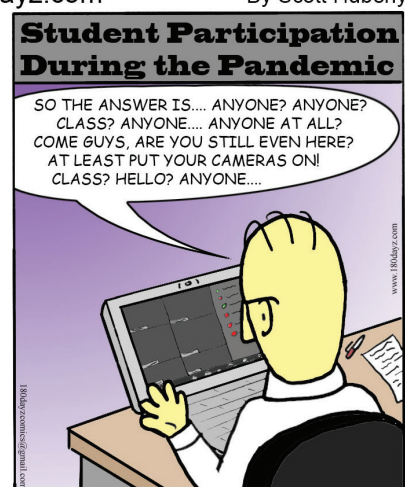
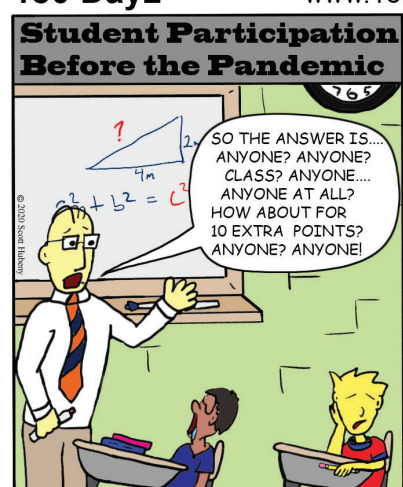
but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of the race but also the accumulated experience of social living.

If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, "brethren!" Be careful, teachers!

75th Anniversary of the Boston Teachers Union Celebration Party

October 16, 2021

180 Dayz www.180dayz.com By Scott Hubeny



I haven't put up a comic in a while, this virtual and hybrid teaching is way more work than I ever imagined. Taking a lesson and reformatting it so that it can be equally effective for students learning from home as well as those coming into the classroom is very challenging to say the least! This has been a challenging year for all: students, parents, teachers, administrators, etc. We are all trying to do the best we can during this time. As I have been gaining experience teaching online, there is an interesting pattern I noticed — a lot of teachers face with students learning online are nearly identical to the issues we had before the pandemic! Take the example of student participation shown in today's comic. It often was just as difficult to get all students to freely participate in class when we were together, as it is now that we are learning online (except now they can really disappear by turning off their cameras!).

— Scott Hubeny

What is the process for filing a grievance?

A grievance is 'a statement which says that a teacher's rights have been violated due to a misrepresentation or misapplication of the contract'. **A grievance must be filed every time an individual teacher's rights are violated in order to protect the rights of the entire membership.** As we know from our most recent contract negotiations, all of our rights are hard fought and must be maintained daily through their implementation. The contract itself as a document is only as good as the enforcement of it at the school level by each and every BTU member. When aspects of the contract are 'overlooked' it can set a dangerous precedent not only for the individual, but for the membership at large.

If aspects of the labor/management agreement, better known as the BTU contract, are not followed as prescribed, then a grievance can and should be filed. The contract details, "An employee or his or her Union rep may either orally or in writing present a grievance to the Principal, Headmaster, or Director within a reasonable time, normally thirty (30) school days after knowledge by the employee of the facts giving rise to the act or condition which is the basis of her or his grievance." It is best to put the Step 1 grievance in writing so that there is adequate documentation that the violation was delivered to the administrator in a timely basis and to curtail any misunderstanding of the intent of the exchange. There is a time limit on how long after the violation has occurred for a BTU member to grieve said violation – it must be done within 30 school days.

BTU Building Reps and/or your respective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The letter should be dated, addressed to the specific Administrator who has the ability to fix or remedy the situation and should state that it is a Step 1 grievance because of the following contractual violation. At this time in the letter, you would detail the violation(s) and site the Article(s) and portion(s) of the contract or BPS Policy that has been violated. The grievance letter should also state the remedy of the grievance or what it would take to fix the situation, making the grievant whole. The letter should be signed by the person(s) being aggrieved. The Step 1 grievance letter should be delivered with your BTU Rep present to assure that the administrator in question has indeed received the document. This is your witness. If it is a grievance entailing a number of people or the entire staff, the letter can include statements such as this grievance includes (names of signers) and 'for all those similarly situated'.

The Bylaws of the Boston Teachers Union state, "The Building Representative should not advise a teacher to disobey or ignore an Administrator's order while a grievance is in progress. This may well hurt the chances for a successful resolution of the grievance and possibly leave the teacher open to charges of insubordination."

The contract states, "The principal ... of the school shall confer with the employee at the time of the complaint or within five (5) school days with a view to arrive at a mutually satisfactory resolution of the grievance." The grievant may be present and/or may be represented by the Union rep and the Administrator "shall give the Union rep the opportunity to be present and state the views of the Union." "The Principal shall communicate his/her decision orally or in writing to the aggrieved employee and to any Union

representative who participated in this Step within five (5) school days after receiving the complaint or within five (5) school days after the conference, whichever is earlier." If the involved Administrator does not get back to the grievant and/or BTU rep within five school days, it is considered a negative response to the grievance.

The BTU Field Representatives process Step 1 grievances and if the grievance is unresolved on Step 1, we refer it to the next Step which, according to the contract, is mediation. When the Step 1 grievance is denied or not responded to within 5 days, the grievant must get a copy of the Step 1 grievance to their respective BTU Field Representative so that we are able to refer it to mediation through the BTU Vice President. If the grievance is unresolved at Step 1, a mediator shall be assigned to assist the parties in an attempt to resolve the complaint. If the dispute is not resolved following the mediation, the grievance may be appealed to the next Step. Once the grievance goes beyond Step 1, the BTU Vice President handles the process of mediation, Steps 2, 3 and finally if necessary, arbitration.

When do programming preference sheets come out?

The contract states, "No later than February 1st, programming preference sheets shall be distributed to all teachers." For High and Middle School teachers it reads, "Programming preference will be honored to the extent consistent with the provisions of this Agreement [contract]. All preference sheets shall be returned by March 1st." This means that a 'preference' is just that, it does not mean that the teacher is guaranteed their choice as submitted.

The contract also details, "On or before February 1st, a list of all non-teaching assignments for which administrative periods are given in a teachers' program shall be posted in each school. These assignments may be applied for in the teacher's program preference sheet as herein [within the contract] provided.

An applicant for such a non-teaching assignment who does not receive the assignment shall, upon his/her request, be given the reasons for not having been selected by the Principal or Headmaster."

What is considered 'corporal punishment' in BPS?

Referring to Superintendent's Circular RLGL-20, 'Corporal Punishment': "Corporal punishment includes but is not limited to the following:

- Slapping or hitting students
- Pulling students by their arms, shoulders, etc.
- Pushing students from one location to another
- Forcibly causing students to sit down
- Grasping students by any body part

Staff may restrain students only in order to protect students, other persons or themselves from an assault and may only use such force as is reasonably necessary to repel such an attack. Violation of the policy and law will result in disciplinary measures and may result in the filing of abuse and/or criminal charges." The circular states, "... the use of corporal punishment is strictly forbidden by BPS Committee policy as well as by Massachusetts State Law G.L.c. 71. [37G]."

This information may seem self-explanatory, but we all should be mindful of the moments in the hallway when a challenging student isn't moving in the direction so told, isn't sitting down after

repeated requests to do so, is behaving in a manner that is confrontational or overly playful, will not extricate themselves from a potentially volatile situation, etc. It is in these moments that our intellectual filters can slip and exasperation or desperation can rear its ugly head resulting in a momentary lapse which in some cases can result in ruining one's career. Even if there have been no repercussions for previously putting one's hands on a student, it is just a matter of time that there will be. When in doubt, do not touch at all. If the act can't be construed into corporal punishment, it could be interpreted as sexual harassment. Don't laugh — there have been many BTU staff who has found themselves in the hot-seat discipline wise over what they honestly viewed as an inconsequential or innocent act. Re-reading the list is a good exercise in prevention.

If I move, get a new phone or email address and update it on the HUB does BPS automatically notify the BTU?

No. You must contact the BTU directly to update changes of address, phone numbers, and email addresses. The BTU does not have access to the updates you file with the BPS.

What is the 'contractual hourly rate' for teachers?

The current contractual hourly rate for teachers is currently \$51.74. During the standard school day, individual teachers are paid at their own rate (pro rata) based on the amount of years teaching (step level) and the amount of educational degrees obtained and graduate credit earned (salary lanes) applied for, approved, and on file at BPS Office of Human Capital.

What happens when there is no heat in my Class?

The contract is clear on this issue. "A classroom will be closed when the temperature falls below 60°f, or whenever the temperature or climate becomes too oppressive."

Report and record the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available space that is heated adequately as well as remedy the heating problem in your classroom. Keep a record or log



Caren Carew
BTU Secondary
Field Representative

of all of the days without heat and the temperature in the room at that time. The Principal should immediately report this in order to have the heat restored. Teachers should file a Step 1 grievance with the Principal as well.

If the entire school falls below the acceptable heat level, each building has an alternate plan in case of emergency. If the heating issue can't be fixed quickly, then the emergency plan for relocation should be employed. The BTU members at the affected school should file a Step 1 grievance at the school in addition. If the entire school is without heat and it has been reported to the School Department, please contact the BTU office as well.

What is the new benefit for maternity/paternity leave for second and third year Provisional Teachers and Paraprofessionals?

Eligible BTU members (teachers and paras in their second and third years of employment) can take the first ten days of their maternity leave with pay and without using any sick time. The next ten days are at 75%, so it would use 2.5 days of sick time to make up the difference. The next ten days are at 50%, so the second and third year provisional teacher or paraprofessional would use an additional five sick days. So, at the end of the first six weeks of maternity leave, the member will have used 7.5 sick days rather than 30 sick days, which was previously the case.

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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BLACK LIVES MATTER

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 to the publication, and in good taste. Letters to the Editor should be sent to letters@btu.org

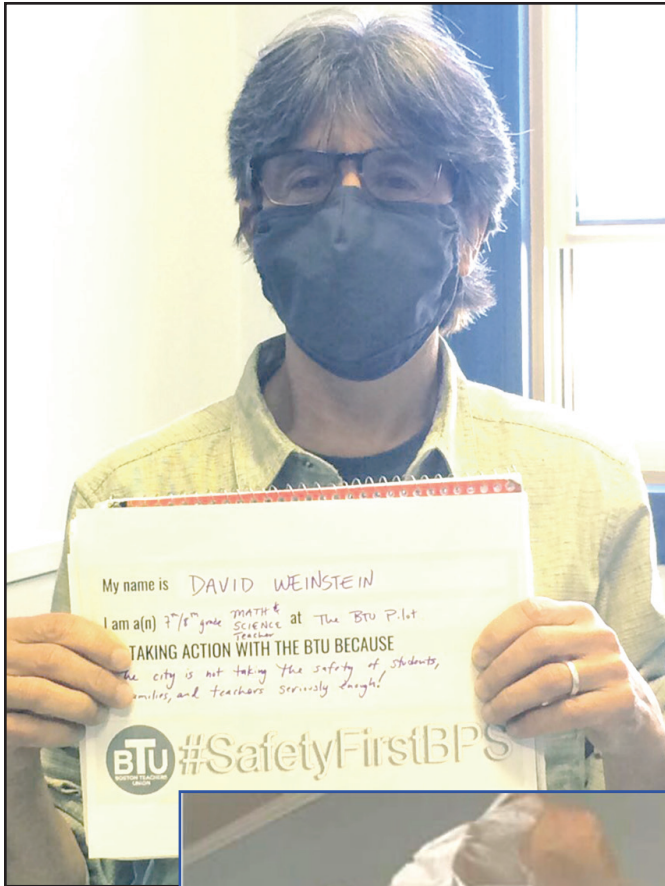
DEADLINE:
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is January 13th. All copy should be e-mailed to mmaguire@btu.org and gvirchick@btu.org. This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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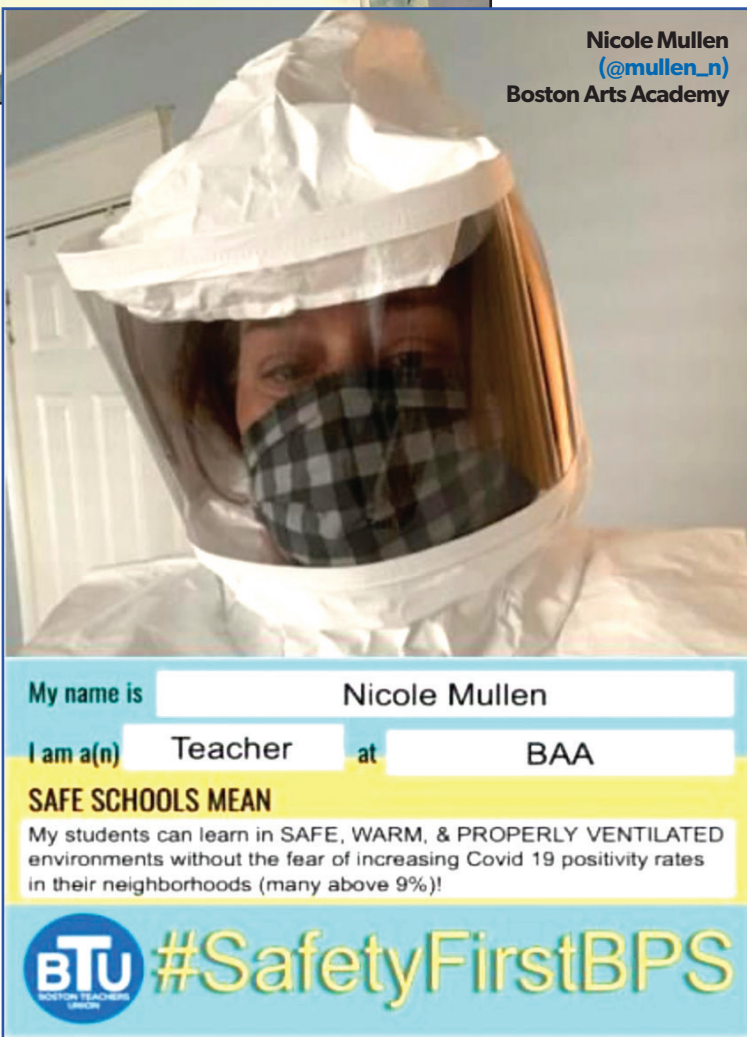
Teachers Take to Twitter Demanding #SafetyFirstBPS



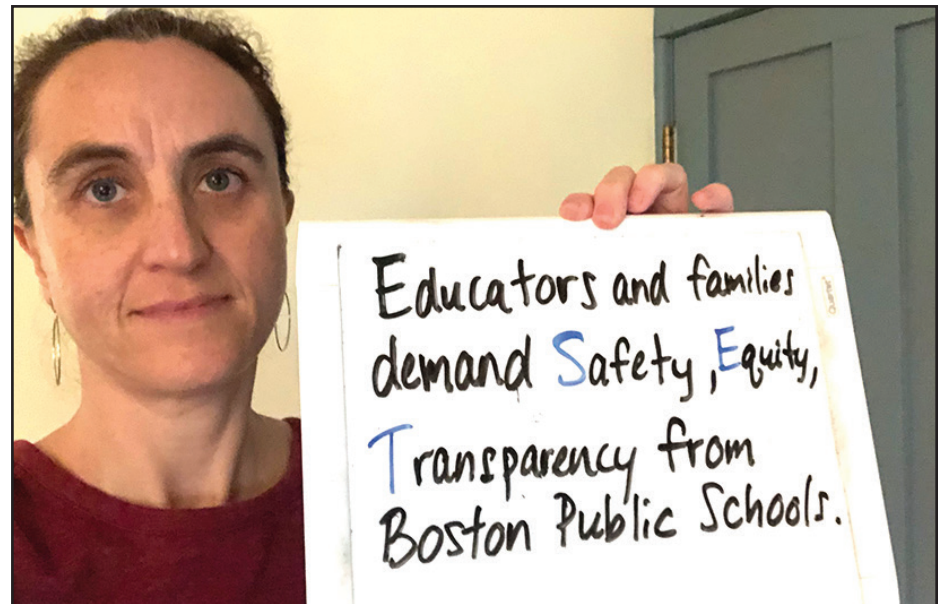
Follow the BTU on Twitter @BTU66



David Weinstein (@DavidWe52822710) BTU Pilot School



Nicole Mullen (@mullen_n) Boston Arts Academy



Sarah Cook (@_sarahcook) McCormack Middle School

Are BPS and the City of Boston S.E.T. to Safely Reopen?

SAFETY

- Adequate PPE for all staff and students
- Commitment to minimize staff in buildings
- Commitment to stop phasing in new schools while rates rise
- Weekly testing for all staff
- Adequate air filtration (at or better than the standards in the most recent MOA)

EQUITY

- Decisions around reopening made based on neighborhood rates and with all voices included, not only those with the most privilege
- Cancel the rents and impose an eviction moratorium
- Provide easily accessible, high-quality, free internet for all
- Improve language access for multilingual families

TRANSPARENCY

- Adequate notice to staff and families around school reopenings
- Adequate time to plan for any transition to in-person
- Transparency around contact tracing and quarantining learning
- Transparency around decision-making for school reopening and metrics used to determine reopening



My name is Michelle Sirois

I am a(n) teacher at the Perry K-8 School

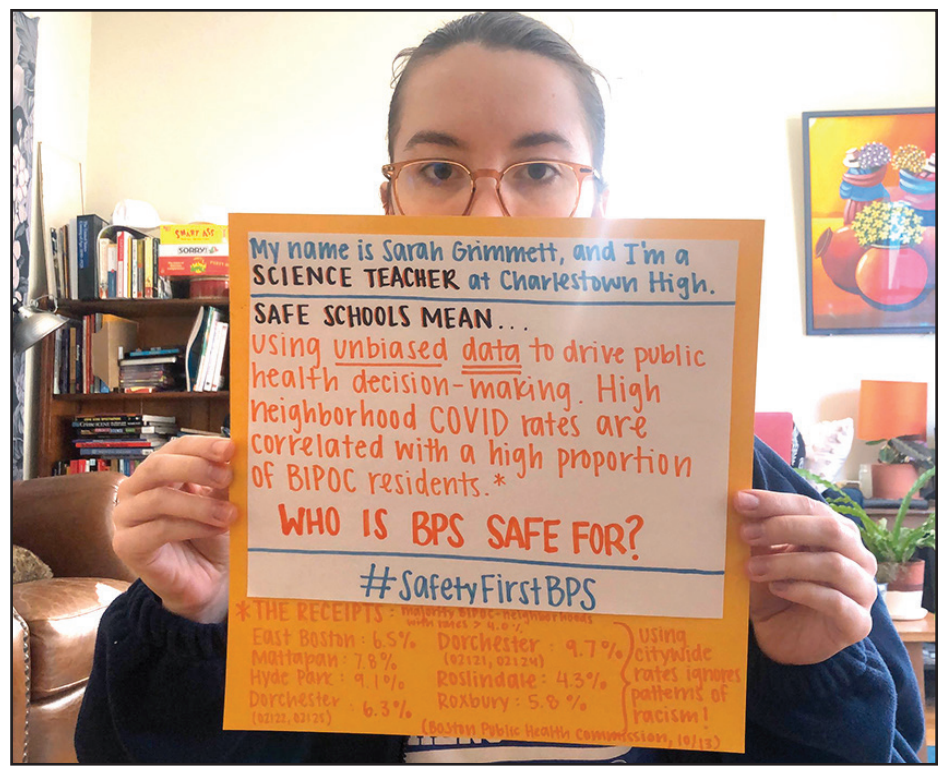
SAFE SCHOOLS MEAN

Contract tracing and transparency for positive Covid cases in schools. Share the data so families can make informed decisions!

BTU **#SafetyFirstBPS**



Michelle Sirois (@msirois7) Perry K-8 School



Sarah Grimmert (@sgrimmert17) Charlestown High

Marna Eckels
@MarnaEckels

Here's my classroom ventilation, courtesy of a box fan awkwardly placed near the tilt-in window. I haven't been given any masks yet, but I heard they arrived at my school today and I will get one. Also pictured: the new \$900 camera we didn't ask for.

#SafetyFirstBPS

Mr. Valenzuela
@mrvalenzuela1

#SafetyFirstBPS Safe schools mean proper ventilation in ALL buildings! Our schools' ventilation is not adequate now and they definitely won't be in the winter!

Worcester spent \$15 mil to upgrade their systems, but the kids of Boston get half measures and cheap shortcuts.

My name is Neema Avashia

I am a(n) Civics Teacher at McCormack Middle School

SAFE SCHOOLS MEAN

Having real ventilation solutions for our schools: needlepoint bipolar ionization systems!

BTU **#SafetyFirstBPS**

Lingua Latina Omnibus

The original version of this story ran in the Boston Herald on October 17, 2015.

Whenever I read “the latest study” on “how far behind” students are during this pandemic, I think of just how outdated our educational system is. I love the Facebook and Instagram posts which counter with “Our students aren’t falling behind, they are surviving a pandemic.” Such posts always remind me that grade-level benchmarks are a) subjective, and b) were established pre-COVID.

I don’t mean to belittle benchmarks; they are important so that we know how education is progressing. The benchmarks, however, did not come down to us from Mt. Olympus. They are an agreed upon set of standards. Let’s agree to reset them.

Let’s add Latin to all our schools.

Now hear me out. I am not an elitist. Offering Latin in all our schools could help close the so-called achievement gap, could ease the tensions around exam schools, and would help us better understand today’s world.

Roughly two-thirds of the words in the English Language are of Latin or Greek origin. These words either came into



English after **William the Conqueror** of French-speaking Normandy invaded England in 1066, or the words were fabricated during the Renaissance to express the advances being made in art, science, and technology. The result is Latin gives the English speaking student a broader vocabulary.

After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into space, American high schools dropped Latin in favor of expanding math and science offerings. Not surprisingly, the average SAT scores showed a sharp and immediate drop and remedial English classes in colleges increased. Latin benefits more than just SAT verbal scores. Latin’s noun and verb forms encourage higher order thinking and help foster deductive reasoning. These skills are

necessary for excellence in the fields of math and science.

Far from being the language of the elite, Latin was spoken by commoners during Roman times. Once a few basic rules are mastered, the language and poetry is easy to follow. Why should the BPS deny a subject sought by so many? Clearly hundreds, if not thousands, of families seek this educational opportunity; it is foolishly shortsighted of the city to ration such enthusiasm.

In most of our high schools the Latin and Haitian populations are quite high. Students who already speak one of the Romance languages would excel at Latin, and thus would improve their English skills simultaneously. Again, I am not an elitist; but wouldn’t it be terrific if Boston graduated thousands of students each year who have mastered Latin?

Just a few months ago the Boston School Committee removed “the test” as an entrance requirement for the three exam schools. I understand that the issues surrounding the exam schools are much more serious than the Latin language, but there is no reason to limit Latin to two schools.

Aside from the language, the history and culture of Rome remains with us



Michael J. Maguire
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

today. Our nation’s Founders drew their inspiration for a new nation from the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Whereas today’s pundits might lament legislative gridlock, the Founders would delight in the knowledge that their Constitution has thus far thwarted a new Caesar from rising to power.

As sensational as **Donald Trump’s** tweets and legal maneuverings are, they are insignificant compared to the machinations of the Julio-Claudians. From immigration and assimilation to economics and infrastructure, Rome offers the United States many positive and negative examples of how to govern.

Over 200 years ago, **William Tudor** called Boston the Athens of America. Today we can live up to that moniker by offering all our students the gift of Latin ... and perhaps even Ancient Greek.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy.)



News from the American Federation of Teachers

AFT on Nomination of Dr. Miguel Cardona as Education Secretary

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel issued the following statement after President-elect Joe Biden nominated Miguel A. Cardona to be the next U.S. secretary of education:

The AFT’s Weingarten said: “Miguel Cardona is not just a proud product of public schools — he’s made strengthening public education and fighting for equity his life’s work. With his experience as a student, fourth-grade teacher, principal, assistant superintendent and commissioner in Connecticut, Dr. Cardona — a former AFT member — will transform the Education Department to help students thrive, a reversal of the DeVos disaster of the last four years.

“But Dr. Cardona, whose family moved from Puerto Rico, won’t just repair the damage done — he’ll act to fulfill the promise and potential of public education and higher education as an opportunity agent for all students, regardless of demography or geography, knowing full well that doesn’t happen without resources and a deep respect for educators.

“His commitment to public education, to our students and to listening to and respecting the wisdom of educators will be crucial as the Biden administration helps school districts across America meet the social, emotional and instructional needs of students and moves to safely, responsibly and equitably reopen school buildings.

“I worked closely with Dr. Cardona during his time in the Meriden, Conn., school district. If you want an example of how labor and management can come together to improve learning and student achievement, you need only look at Meriden. His deep respect for educators and their unions will travel with him to Washington — and that commitment to collaboration is crucial to providing the resources and social and emotional supports to safely reopen schools.

“There is great potential for a renaissance in public education after years and years of the school wars. That is the hope that Dr. Cardona, with Joe Biden, Kamala Harris and Dr. Jill Biden at his side, represents. The Department of Education is the primary vehicle by which the Biden-Harris administration can engage educators, parents, and legislators and administrators at every level. It can lift up great practices and strategies. Instead of promoting competition, it can foster cooperation; instead of destabilizing, it can help American schools recover and grow. Instead of dividing, it can help students of all diverse backgrounds grow and thrive.

“And, in higher education, it can address the student loan crisis and strengthen colleges and universities — especially HBCUs and minority-serving institutions.

“From day one, educators will have a trusted partner in Dr. Cardona, and I couldn’t be more excited to get started.”

AFT Connecticut’s Hochadel said: “When he was first appointed as Connecticut’s education commissioner, Dr. Cardona outlined an overall vision of ‘reimagining’ education here in Connecticut. Before the pandemic hit, he engaged educators on

issues ranging from reducing standardized testing to ensuring equity for all students to closing the diversity gap in our schools.

“The COVID-19 crisis has forced new and unique challenges on administrators, classroom teachers and school support staff alike. As Dr. Cardona himself has said, in 2020 ‘everyone’s a first-year teacher again; everyone’s a first-year principal.’ Our union members understand that even the commissioner is in his first-year, along with the rest of us.

“The opportunity for a true educator with classroom experience and a leader who understands that challenge is exciting for anyone who cares about the future of America’s public schools.”

AFT President Randi Weingarten Responds to Congressional Agreement on the Latest Round of COVID-19 Relief

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten issued the following statement after congressional negotiators reached a deal on coronavirus relief:

“While this deal is both too late and not perfect, it is a necessary lifeline that we support. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and others’ refusal to help address the needs of states and localities, which have been America’s frontline since COVID-19 erupted, is a bitter pill.

“Since the pandemic took hold in early March, 8 million more people in the United States have been plunged into poverty. Demand at food banks is up 60 percent. Millions of Americans remain unemployed, and as healthcare workers face unprecedented COVID-19 cases, educators work around the clock to meet the needs of their students, all while facing diminished state budgets, chaotic safety protocols and increased concerns about vaccine and testing availability.

“And with the life-sustaining benefits provided by the CARES Act set to expire, it’s not a moment too soon. If passed, this emergency aid would invest much-needed resources into our public schools for testing, cleaning, PPE, ventilation upgrades and other safety guardrails, as well as baseline budget appropriations of \$16.5 billion for Title I and \$14.1 billion for special education, so educators can help address the social and emotional well-being and academic needs of their students.

“These resources are vital to reopening school buildings safely—and, in turn, to help get people back to work safely as well. As we wait for the Biden-Harris administration to take charge of recovery efforts and continue our work to secure more funding for our cities, states and communities, Congress should pass this critical relief to ease the suffering of America’s families.”

AFT’s Weingarten on Joe Biden’s Plan to Reopen Schools in First 100 Days

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten issued the following statement after President-elect Joe Biden announced his plan to reopen the majority of U.S. schools in the first 100 days of his term with the supports in place to protect students, educators and staff. The AFT released its “Blueprint to Safely Open Schools” last week.

“Hallelujah! Unlike Trump, President-elect Biden understands that if we secure

the resources and put the public health safeguards in place, we can open schools safely in the second semester — and his first 100 days. This is what visionary, steady and effective leadership during a pandemic looks like. Between this, a vaccine and a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director who is ready to give national guidance free of political interference, we see a path forward for safe school buildings reopening.”

The Disconnect

I want to tell you about the disconnect between our governing bodies, the community, and the Teachers Union about the reopening of school.

We are all reading the same data and reading the same studies, but how are we so far apart on the issue.

The cause of the disconnect is how we interact with BPS communities.

SEE. We as teachers come to serve and build up. While others come to control and be built up by communities. We empower communities, while others are powered by communities. They clean your homes, basically raise your children, get your coffee, and do the tasks that help you maintain your status.

We suffer with communities while others don't know them enough to suffer with them.

We give to communities while others take from communities. (Like their land to build sports fields and condos)

We stand with communities while others kneel, sorry, stand on their necks.

SEE the disconnect is our view of the communities we want to send back to school.

Some of us have a parallel view of the communities in Boston. We see the sick, hurt, scared, old, forgotten, hungry, those lacking in hugs, those who are unsafe in their own homes, or who are homeless.

Others have a view from the top, they see a herd, or a crowd, or a mass. They see numbers.

What we need to do.

- Thoughtful reopening guidance and plans should be **informed by union educators, families, and community partners.** This includes passing vital legislations, like the HEROES Act and disbursing the funds from the Student Opportunities Act.

- With limited time and resources, we should be **focused on improving remote learning first** as we plan for a safe, phased-in introduction of safe in-person

teaching and learning later in the year when and if it is appropriate to do so.

- No students and staff should be asked to risk their lives by going back in person – not even under a hybrid plan – until **all possible health and safety precautions have been addressed.** Purchasing and distributing PPE based on individual school need.

- a. Applying all science-based guidelines and OSHA requirements for safely reopening of schools

- b. Repairing windows and HVAC systems if necessary

- c. Establishing baseline protocols for maintenance and cleaning

- d. Establishing protocols for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases, including isolation rooms, testing and contact tracing.

The things we are asking should be easily agreed upon since it will save lives,



Joel Richards

minimize risk and connect teachers back to the communities that we love and care for.

In summary, the problem is one group is connected to the families and students while another is disconnected.

That's all I got.

(Joel Richards teaches at the Blackstone School.)

COVID-19 Forces the Union to Be Unified and Stay Strong

By Joel Richards,
Blackstone School

If 2020 and COVID-19 has shown our union anything, it's that we need to be unified and stay unified.

The loss of deniability

COVID-19 has exposed the systemic issues that plague the communities we serve. The issues can no longer be hidden behind fancy studies or titles. The majority of our students come to our school building hungry and hurting. For decades teachers have been the bandaid stretched very thin over deep cuts. COVID-19 ripped that bandaid off and now society can no longer ignore the racial bleeding of communities of color in Boston.

What was lost

Now that teachers don't provide internet, family counseling, hugs, food, child care, and emotional support for Boston's neediest families the city has lost their greatest crutch/veil.

However, this great loss could be an opportunity for a unified group of workers to unite under the banner of change and true equality. United with an Anti-racist mindset we could make changes that could improve the lives of Boston families for generations to come.

Get out of the way

Access to the internet affects all poor children, but disproportionately affects children of color, food scarcity affects all poor children, but disproportionately affects children of color. If you want to argue with numbers and facts, in grace and in truth, I am not interested in hearing your excuses so please step out of the way and let us work.

Passivity is a sin

Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.

– Proverbs 18:9

This is a call to action to all union members who: love their students, who know in their hearts the way Boston families are being treated is wrong, who are sick and tired of being sick and tired, who give their all to only be consistently disrespected by the city. For the members who watch as the families they serve, simply desire a decent school, but are consistently given less. Who watch budgets at the same schools get smaller, while "other" schools budgets increase.

For the members who stand with parents to fight for chromebooks, para professionals, bus monitors, hot lunches, hot breakfasts, field trips, sports, and after school activities.

We can no longer fight in silos, we must unify as one union. We must join together and for once remove the wall of oppression that is crushing BPS families.

Current fight

"We're not saying we don't want to reopen, but we want to reopen correctly," Richards told WGBH News Thursday. "We can't afford another interruption if we open and then all of a sudden there's another spike and we have to close. We can't afford for East Boston to spike again. We can't afford for Mattapan or Dorchester to spike again — that's a lot of loss."

"Why?"

We are not asking for money, or different hours, new schools, water fountains. We want school environments that will save lives and not spread COVID-19 to our own families and BPS families. How are we in a fight for the safety of the city? How did the people that have continually filled in the gap for families find themselves fighting for the lives of families? Why isn't the city working with us? Why aren't they committed to the safety of BPS families the same way we are?

"Our fight is just"

We are currently fighting for a safe and equitable return to in-person instruction. A return that is signed and agreed upon between labor partners. Please visit the BTU website or check your email to get all details pertaining to this.

The fight to come

The day will come when we return back to full in-person school and as a union we need to decide what that looks like. As a unified body we need to prepare ourselves for schools that meet students where they are. Can we truly return from this pandemic and act like we can just jump back into the curriculum? This situation has shown us that the burden of planning, preparing, advocating, and creating interventions for our students will be placed at our feet and we have to collectively pick it up.

This may seem overwhelming and even unfair, but the truth is teaching children trapped in the margins by society has always been overwhelming and

unfair.

COVID-19 was the final straw that fell on the thousands of other straws that have always been placed on our collective backs. We need unity and our students need our unity.

Simple things you can do to help and show unity:

- 1. Read all Bulletins and relevant information from our union.

- 2. Attend all Union meetings. (Even if it is just on in the background while you cook, wrangle, heard, bath, and feed your children)

- 3. Participate in all actions by the union. Make a sign, show up and shout, drive by honk your horn. You don't have to be brave just show up! We are a collective of people, we can be courageous and outspoken together.

- 4. Tell your neighbors. Write letters,

write emails, call people and tell them why the union is fighting and that we need their help.

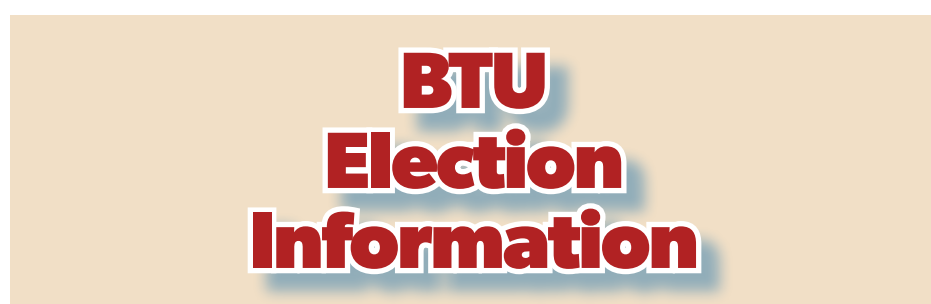
- 5. Call your local and national representation. Let them know we need their help.

- 6. Tell your students and families they matter and deserve better.

- 7. Encourage each other. Send notes, emails, gift cards, lunch. Remind each other that we are in this together.

- 8. Take care of yourself. Practice self care.

How we feel is how many people throughout this city have felt their whole lives. COVID-19 has pushed more of us into the margins. So I ask/challenge you, if the city wants to push us into the margins with the families we serve, let's fight like hell to get out and create a path for the families of Boston to follow us.



Interested in running for office?

Nominations will open after the January membership meeting for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary Treasurer, Political Director, Field Representative, Executive Board, Paraprofessional Council, and Delegate to All Affiliated Bodies. The committee will host a New Candidate Orientation Event via Zoom at 5 p.m. on January 19, 2021. Former BTU President **Richard Stutman** will moderate. A detailed candidate guide will be available soon. This timeline gives an overview of the important dates and deadlines for potential candidates.

Election Committee News

The Election Committee meets via Zoom at 5 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month. BTU and RTC members are welcome to attend, and can obtain the link by emailing **Denice Dwyer** at ddwyer@btu.org. Fifteen minutes is set aside at the beginning of each meeting for member questions and comments. Unlike past years (and due to the pandemic), candidates will primarily collect their nomination signatures electronically this year. The BTU tech team has been working on a secure system that will allow BTU and RTC members to nominate ("sign for") candidates by logging into the BTU member portal. A paper option will still be available for those who prefer it. The nomination/signature collection process will run from January 13 to March 10. Details of the new procedures will be available shortly.

Grassroots Campaign Virtual Training Event: Saturday, January 30, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Join Mass Alliance, AFT Mass and BTU for a training event to introduce future campaign leaders, activists, and candidates to the theory and practice behind successful grassroots campaigning. Sessions will include field organizing, message development, working with the press, and other time-tested tactics for winning campaigns. Contact **Roberto Jiménez Rivera** at rjimenez@btu.org or **Johnny McInnis** at jmcinnis@btu.org.

Hysteria 2021 / Try Laughing!

Remember when we were growing up and every book had a dead dog in it? (#No More Dead Dogs by Gordon Korman.) What we need right now is some silly book suggestions to shake off the apocalypse. I love funny books that are just about being silly and maybe not so much about teaching a lesson. These are the books that kids want to hear every day over and over.

One of the picture books that I love is *Hippos Go Berserk*, by Sandra Boynton although I read this to a second grader the other day and he gave it a mixed review.

For early grades (K2-2ish) check out the *Dory Fantasmagory* series by Abby Hanlon. I think the first one is the funniest and the most true to the imaginative world of little kids, but there are some laugh out loud funny parts in both *Dory and the Real True Friend* and *Dory Dory Black Sheep*. This is one of my favorite scenes from *Dory Fantasmagory and the Real True Friend*. Here Dory opens her lunch and takes out a banana, not a phone and says:

I open my lunch box and I AM SHOCKED to discover that my mom packed my phone!! Why would she pack my phone? What was she thinking? Oh my goodness, WHAT IF IT RINGS? Please please please don't let it ring. Uh-oh.

R-r-r-r-i-n-g
I have to answer it. If I don't answer it, Mr. Nuggy will be chicken soup. "Hello?"
"Dory, how are you?" asks Mrs. Gobble Gracker.
"Fine," I say, looking around the noisy cafeteria. I have to cover the other ear so I can hear her. "I've decided what I want," she says.

For middle school readers, or as a read aloud, *The Teacher's Funeral: a comedy in three parts* is one of my favorite books by Richard Peck. This hilarious book is set on in Indiana farmland in 1904 and begins with the line, "If your teacher has to die, August isn't a bad time of year for it."

I recently found myself trying to remember a movie that I liked. When I described this memory to my daughter she said, "I saw that movie too," and then we realized that it was *The Teacher's Funeral* that we both remembered with such vivid imagery. I love all of Peck's work, especially *Ghosts I Have Been* and *The Ghost Belonged to Me*.

Lauren Clarke Mason's favorites include:

Mo Willum's Pigeon series

This clever pigeon speaks directly to your little ones as he pleads to do the impossible. I'm sure the younger audience might even see themselves within the pages as



the persistent feathered friend tries to convince the reader to let them drive. A great read aloud that is only enhanced by how much character you put into expressing the different emotions the pigeon expresses throughout the story.

For older readers, *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster is a challenging kind of funny. The author plays with language through puns and double meanings that create a subtle kind of humor that keeps children engaged. You may have to explain some of the more subtle jokes in the story, but once you have shared one or two hidden joke gems, students look for the funny all around them to share with the class. There are a couple of animated movies out there if you like to pair them with books. With the exception of the saga of a certain orphaned wizard, I don't often see the movie, preferring to live my life as a book snob.

One of my favorite children's authors is Louis Sachar, author of *The Wayside School* series. While that series might be a hit with younger independent readers, some of his other novels have more of a substantive plot.

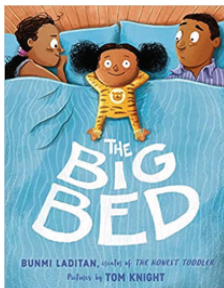
In the story *Dogs Don't Tell Jokes* the main character Gary Boone dreams of being a stand up comedian but in his middle school he is often the butt of the jokes. The story is relatable to middle grade students as Gary tries so hard to be laughed with rather than laughed at.



Here are some more funny book faves from our wonderful BPS librarians (and a few teachers!)

Morgan Van Clief, librarian Media Specialist at the PA Shaw Elementary said:

The Big Bed by Bunmi Laditan always has my younger students laughing. It's about a little girl who doesn't want to sleep in her own bed at night and hilariously



Not only are funny books enjoyable to read, this article from Parents Magazine lists four ways that funny books can engage students. Funny books can:

1. Help Kids Fall in Love With Books: On the most basic level, kids who read or listen to funny books and enjoy them will associate the act of reading as being fun. This is especially important when matching books to struggling or reluctant readers, as it's a great way to help kids connect and fall in love with books.

2. Motivate Kids to Read: Reluctant and struggling readers, in particular, need to find books that hook them in and keep their interest. ...The potty humor in *Captain Underpants* by Dav Pilkey has the potential to entice a child to want to read the whole series.

3. Enhances Comprehension: We tend to remember information that is associated with a certain emotion or sensory triggers. We remember these parts of the stories because they make us laugh.

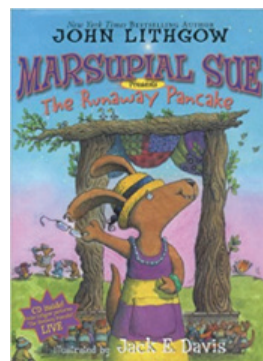
4. Helps Kids Deal With Difficult Situations: A challenging situation can often be lightened with a little humor. The laughter can come from funny books where characters grapple with the same tough topics the reader is facing. (adapted from Parents Magazine, J Rodriguez 2018)

Spotlight book: *This is not the Abby Show* by Debbie Reed Fischer is a hilarious chapter book about Abby, a seventh grader who has ADHD. What I really liked about this book was that the theme of the book isn't overtly overcoming, as much as it shows how ADD can be different for different people. The main character is charismatic and funny as she gets into trouble and works her way out of it.

pleads her case to her dad. For my older students that prefer an early chapter book, the *EllRay Jakes* series by Sally Warner always has them giggling at the trouble the main character gets into. Both books feature Black protagonists.

Heidi Boulogne, School Librarian Josiah Quincy Elementary School said:

The Digital titles my students always laugh listening/reading: *Marsupial Sue Presents: The Runaway Pancake* on Tumblebooks by John Lithgow



Kerry O'Rourke, grade 2 teacher from the Edison K-8 said:

My kids are reading *The Mad Scientist Next Door* on Epic! There are good comics in Epic and the *Mercy Pig* books are funny.



Billie MacDonald, library para from the BTU School's personal favorites include:

Walter the Farting Dog by Kotzwinkle, Murray, Colman (*Warning: This book may cause flatulence!*)
Baa-Baa Smart Sheep by Mark

Sommerset and Rowan Sommerset
Books That Drive Kids CRAZY!: Did You Take the B from My _ook? by Beck Stanton and Matt Stanton



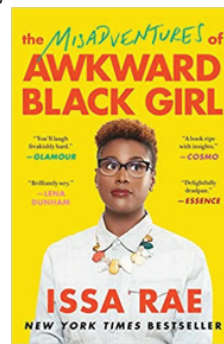
We Don't Eat Our Classmates by Ryan T. Higgins

We all agreed that: *The Book With No Pictures* by BJ Novak definitely is hilarious as a read aloud for kids.

Felicia Humphries, Excel High School librarian recommends:

I'm Judging You by Luvvie Ajayi
Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar
Miss Nelson is Missing by Harry G. Allard
The Day the Crayons Quit (Series) by Drew Daywalt
Oliver Jeffers
The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl by Issa Rae

(This book of short essays is really funny for secondary students but has some adult themed essays, so preview and choose carefully!)



Maura O'Toole from the Blackstone recommends:

The Alvin Ho series by Lenore Look illustrated by LeUyen Pham is a hilarious series, and it is especially wonderful because it features an Asian American protagonist, who lives in Massachusetts, and is a selective mute. Each one of my students at The Mather who read it, loved it. *El Deafo* by Cece Bell is also hilarious- it is a graphic novel that stars a rabbit who went deaf from an illness. It is loosely based on Cece Bell's life. One stand out part of the novel is when the teacher forgets to turn off the FM device, and the main character can hear her using the bathroom.

I asked my dear friend Whitney Weeder, grade one teacher from the James Otis School and she said. *I find if there is a diaper in the story kids love it!* How true my friends. How true. I once had a small group of first graders writing jokes and I was a little thrown off when the jokes made no sense, but then the whole table would crack up. I realized that whether the jokes made sense to me didn't matter. It was the laughing that mattered. Hope all the hysteria in 2021 is the laughing kind!

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

More funny stuff from *Dory Fantasmagory* *Dory Dory Blacksheep*:

As I leave the room, I hear his small muffled voice from the hamper, "Excuse me Captain Puff? It's sort of uncomfortable because I'm sitting on some wet hiking clothes that fell in the toilet!"

When my mom picks me up, she asks me a million questions in the car. "Where was Rosabelle's brother? I thought she had a little brother? And I don't understand how nobody knows where your clothes are? Why did you put that costume- that is clearly way too small for you- on in the first place? It's a size 3, Rascal! That means it's for three-year-olds. How on earth did you get it over your head? I feel terrible that we had to take their costume. We're going to have to cut it off! With scissors. At least we left them the cape. Rascal, why do we do these things?"

"A hero does good for good." I say in my Captain Puff voice. "Not for glory."



Call for Submissions!

Are you a writer? Would you like to see your work published in the BTU paper? We are accepting submissions from all BTU members including current and retired teachers. Short story, novel excerpts, essays and poems will all be considered. Enter your submission to Anne Slater at anne.slater70@gmail.com