

## Boston Teachers Union "Poetry Helps Heal the Pain"

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



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

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President's Report Jessica J. Tang

## The Schools Our Students and Educators Deserve

As we continue to fight against state interventions, it is also important to remember and elevate what we are fighting FOR. As we have shared in our recent negotiations, we know our students deserve safe and welcoming facilities, social workers, guidance counselors, libraries and librarians, inclusion done right, adequate staffing, educators working under sustainable working conditions, educators who are respected and valued and so much more. (Learn more at [btu.org/contract](http://btu.org/contract)) In addition to our most recent contract proposals, we have also been advocating, both locally and nationally, via the AFT for Community Schools.

The concept of Community Schools is not a new one. It is a framework based on the recognition that bottom up stakeholder informed solutions to address school needs are what schools need to empower educators and families to make the changes they want to see. It is also based on the idea that schools can and should be places that bring together whole child and whole family resources and supports, and serve as a Hub for our neighborhoods and communities.

We have seen successful and similar efforts within BPS for decades—including the recently written Globe story on the Timilty middle school, for example, which provided access to wrap around supports and rich partnerships based on the needs of the school community, known as the Project Promise model. Other schools, including the Edwards and Blackstone (which actually says "Blackstone Community School" on its façade still today) similarly shared many of these traits.

Unfortunately, however, as reforms become more like fads and tried-and-true methods often end up by the wayside, so too have community schools been neglected. The Timilty and Edwards closures are symbolic of the fate of many of these schools.

The concept, however never entirely went away and so as a teacher at the Young Achievers school in 2012, I saw firsthand how families benefited from wraparound services, before and after school programming, strong family engagement and community partnerships. When I became the BTU Organizing Director in 2013, I also learned more about the Community Schools

movements in Cincinnati and Baltimore through the AFT conferences and conventions.

As we fought back inequitable reforms like state interventions and unfettered charter expansion, I knew we needed also to FIGHT FOR what students actually needed, and realized community schools were a part of the solution.

So in 2013 I reached out to BPS and met Jonathan Sproul and Marta Gredler, who had been working on expanding community schools in BPS. We created a coalition including the YMCA, Black Ministerial Alliance, Boston Education Justice Alliance and others because we knew that we would have to organize to push the district and city to embrace and sustain this model.

Over the next few years we would meet regularly, continuing to grow the coalition, hosting events, even going to retreats together to learn more and to share what community schools were and we continued advocating for and building a movement in Boston. Along the way we learned community schools were too easily confused with "neighborhood"

schools—a lighting rod issue in Boston—and so we rebranded community schools as Hub Community Schools.

In the last contract, we were able to advocate for and win a district Hub Schools Coordinator. As we searched for a new superintendent in 2019, we interviewed a woman named Dr. Brenda Casellius who shared a commitment to Hub Community Schools and would, of course, then become our superintendent. She understood the importance of this framework and this year, followed through on her commitment to creating more Hub Community Schools.

And now today, after almost a decade of organizing and advocacy, we have 14 Hub Schools coordinators who met together at our headquarters last month. As I shared with them, it is an exciting moment and, along with the family liaisons and additional guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologist investments, our schools are poised to address the many needs that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Yet there still is much work to be done. These positions were funded by



Jessica J. Tang  
BTU President

short-term federal funds. In a couple of years we will be facing a fiscal cliff. This is why our proposals also include codifying these gains and investments. Otherwise every time there is a budget cut, we lose ground. It is through our advocacy and organizing that we are able to make gains for our students and schools. It is through contract that we ensure that progress we have made is sustained and continues to move forward. And it is through our collective action and unity that we are able to win a contract our students and educators deserve and why, in the last weeks of this school year, we need everyone to continue to engage in our actions as we fight for the schools our students and educators deserve!

## Boston Teachers Union, Community Members Testify to School Committee; Approaching 8 Months Without a Contract

by BTU Organizing Team

During the public comment period of Wednesday's School Committee meeting, members of the Boston Teachers Union and community underscored the need for a new contract. After two years of working in extremely difficult conditions, the union is entering their eighth month without a contract or consistent negotiations.

"We are united here this evening to share our proposals and ask for weekly bargaining sessions, because now, perhaps more than ever, a contract is needed to address a wide range of issues in our district including special education, [supports for] multilingual learners, facilities, and common good proposals including housing for our families facing unaffordable and unstable housing," proclaimed BTU President Jessica Tang.

The trickle-down effect of educator instability has been shown to have

a negative impact on students, as explained by member testimonies. At a time when educator shortages have become even more acute as a result of pandemic related burnout, pressures and stress, retaining educators has become even more urgent.

"The foundation of great teaching lies in great relationships. Students need to know and trust in the people they are learning from... Teachers are leaving schools like the one I work in at an alarming rate," detailed UP Academy educator and BTU member Jules Devasto.

While advocating for updated wages and facilities, strengthening social-emotional support in schools and more, the union also outlines proposals for the common good, such as housing assistance for BPS families.

"[BTU's] proposals relating to housing justice are especially important to

me... How can a student even contemplate worrying about their coursework when they are worried about where they will be living? I know firsthand how deeply having a home impacts your emotional, social, and academic well-being," said BPS student Kayla Quinlan.

A comprehensive contract for teachers will benefit the entire BPS community. In the same sense that BPS educators deserve fair and equitable wages, Boston students deserve educator stability, updated facilities, and increased in-school support systems. After two years of uncertainty in our schools, it is time to lay the foundation for the future of BPS.

"There is no reason we can't get this done expeditiously... A fair and equitable contract is the morale boost and show of appreciation and respect that our educators and families deserve," concluded BTU President Jessica Tang.



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

## Commentary Michael J. Maguire

# A Wages Only Offer Should Mean Good Wages

**A**fter a year of negotiating for a new contract, the Boston Public Schools offered us (the BTU) a three-year wages-only contract. The proposal was 1.5% for SY 21-22, 2% for SY 22-23, and 2% for SY 23-24. That's 5.5% percent over three years.

While still a raise, that 5.5% feels like a pay cut when you consider inflation. The official inflation rate according to the U.S. government is 7.9%, but that was before the spike in gas prices. That 7.9% is the national average. Here in Boston we have been experiencing record high cost of living increases due primarily to the skyrocketing cost of housing.

Allow me to give you an historical perspective. In 1994 I was a rookie teacher. I earned roughly \$27,000. I purchased a rental property for

\$120,000. I rented out two units and I lived in the third. I was able to make ends meet primarily because I did not have student loan debt. For quick math let's say it took four yearly salaries for me to be able to afford that house.

Let's fast forward to today. A rookie teacher's starting salary today is \$63,805 and that same house is listed on Zillow at \$765,600. Again let's use quick math. To purchase that same house today would cost twelve annual salaries. If we account for the doubling of a teacher's starting salary since 1994, that same house costs three times as much today as it did decades ago. Think of it this way, for a rookie teacher to have the same spending power that I had when I was a rookie, that teacher's salary would need to be at least \$180,000.

Rents in Boston are \$3,500 a month for a three bedroom and the median listing for a single family home is \$800,000. Whether you rent or own in Boston today, the salaries needed to acquire shelter today is \$120,000. These figures are not for high end accommodations. These figures are the everyday reality of those of us who work and live in Boston.

The Boston Herald loves to publish our salaries as if we are fleecing the

taxpayers. Six-figure salaries used to mean wealth, today six-figures is barely getting by. And five-figures is being squeezed.

The latest BPS salary offer is keeping us squeezed. 5.5% over three years when inflation is in fact over 8% annually means that our spending power will decrease over the life of the proposed contract. If we accepted such a small offer, we would be living the old adage of doing more with less.

In the past this union has accepted a 2% annual salary increase. We are just coming off such an increase the year before this year. However, in previous circumstances we as a union had gains in other places such as the increase of school nurses or increases in the base salary of paraprofessionals. A smaller annual raise need not be a deal breaker if other parts of a contract offer are beneficial.

In the current situation the BPS is only offering a wage increase. No accompanying reduction in class sizes or case loads. No improvements to our job or to the learning conditions of our students. Simply a payout, and a small one at that.

Boston is in the midst of a mammoth building boom. While construction was temporarily halted at

the start of the pandemic, the pace I see now is more than making up for lost time. Boston has the money.

Our nay-sayers have already started with the old tropes of "only working six hour days" and "must be nice to have summers off." Many of us have to put in extra hours every night just to keep up. Many also spend Sundays away from families so that we can plan for the upcoming week. Let's not even get me going about summer PDs and all the time it takes to set up our rooms. Imagine if we got paid time-and-a-half for all those hours! Wouldn't it be nice.

Neither a new mayor nor a new superintendent should be a reason we go a year or more without a contract. We have done double duty for the past two years and we want to keep working with our students. Maybe the city is not concerned with The Great Resignation but I sure am. A handful of my colleagues are looking for other jobs. (And those are just the ones I know about.)

Low pay and high stress are a bad combination for our profession...and for our students. If the city wants to put student learning back on the right track, it will need to retain as many veteran teachers as possible. Keeping our pay competitive is a step in the right direction.

## A Psalm for Teachers (A Psalm is a song or poem that expresses great joy or sorrow)

*People keep asking why Teachers are leaving.*

*We are leaving teaching because the systemic oppression of Black people/children within the system has become a burden almost too heavy to bear.*

### Transfer of trauma

For years we have watched and persevered and guided students through the margins of society. The rough seas we have navigated made us excellent sailors. However, the margins are crushing us all. We ourselves are being crushed. High gas prices, extraordinary rental rates, our deferred dreams of home ownership. We ourselves are dealing with our own trauma. For years the transfer of trauma from our students was at least bearable, but now when we cry for them, we are crying for ourselves too.

### Even Jesus fell

The cross wasn't too heavy for Jesus, the road not too rocky, he had walked that path before. He fell because the condition he was in was not suitable enough to bear the weight of that cross. We are not leaving because the job is too hard or because the hours are too long. The impossible task of teaching complex subjects despite the rampant and immoral poverty is a road we have traveled many times. The condition we are in is no longer suitable enough to bear the weight of this cross.

### Insult to injury

The system will kneel on your neck then kneel in a moment of silence. We see this and feel mocked. We never asked for gestures or words. Give us HVAC, give us neighborhood schools, give us shorter days and after-school programs. We are leaving because we are being mocked.

### For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

They say you can tell what a city values by its budget. But we know this isn't true. Budgets are like a rain cloud that never finds its way to the thirsty. You can tell what a city values by the conditions of its buildings. Do the poor have clean and well-designed buildings? We can tell our students' worth by the rusty play structures, cracked blacktops, and mulch-covered playgrounds filled with rat poop. We know our students' worth by how long the lines are at food banks and how many makeshift memorials to the dead are in their neighborhoods. When they light candles for the dead, they light them for the living too.

### We are leaving

- Because dog parks have clean drinking water fountains and we do not.
- Because we have seen the hurt children become broken adults.
- Because we can be sexually harassed or threatened and then be mocked for being scared or uncomfortable.
- Because it hurts to give up on a child the system has failed.
- Because of the rat feces.
- Because we can be physically assaulted with no consequences.
- Because nurses leave at noon, and students vomit and get fevers at 12:30 pm.
- Because it is hard to watch an autistic child never get support and become depressed and suicidal.
- Because we advocate and get ignored.
- Because we are mocked.

### Our Hope

We will never stop advocating because every teacher, those that stay and those that leave (because your heart is always with your students/treasure), has the same dreams/prayers/hopes: that our students can walk to school in their neighborhoods, arrive at well-maintained buildings that are filled with smiling adults, that the food they eat represents their cultures, and the books they read empower them to fulfill their dreams.



(Joel Richards teaches at the Blackstone School. He's on Twitter @MrRichardsBOS.)

We will never stop advocating or hoping because without that hope, all we would have is our tears.

# Does the Union Offer Occupational Liability Coverage for Its' Members?



**Caren Carew**  
BTU Secondary  
Field Representative

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) our national affiliate (the BTU is local 66 of the AFT), provides liability protection for claims or charges arising out of the employment activities of its' members. The Plan offers members from participating locals broad protection for legal defense costs and court judgements. The coverage protects members from a wide range of employment related issues, including defense of alleged criminal acts.

## Coverage under this Plan includes the following:

- \$1 million of protection per members per occurrence for damages arising out of the following: bodily injury; property damage; personal injury.
- **Criminal Defense:** The Plan also reimburses certain legal expenses to defend any claim made against a member resulting from the commission of a criminal act, where such a charge arises out of the members' employment-related activities. \$5,000 per member per year, regardless of the outcome; Reimbursement up to \$35,000 in total, which is made only if the member is completely exonerated. Complete exoneration means that a finding or verdict of not guilty has been entered into the record or the charges are dismissed in their entirety without appeal. In both cases, reimbursement is for reasonable and approved legal expenses.
- **Denial of constitutional rights:** In cases where such charges arise solely out of the members' employment activities, the Plan will pay up to \$250,000 per member per calendar year and up to \$1 million for any one incident.
- **Licensing:** \$5,000 reimbursement for legal representation before an administrative board for licensing, where the proceeding arises out of the members' employment activities and involves the issuance, maintenance or revocation of a members' license.
- **Assault death benefit:** If a member dies as a result of assault that occurs at work, the Plan shall pay a \$50,000 death benefit to the beneficiary if the members' death occurs within 90 days of the assault.

You must be a member of a participating AFT local to access the benefits and protections of this coverage. The BTU is local 66 of the AFT. To file a claim contact: John Eastern Company toll free AFT line: 877-590-5562; fax: 813-402-7943; email: [AFT@JohnsEastern.com](mailto:AFT@JohnsEastern.com) to obtain a claim form: [www.aft.org/OL-claim](http://www.aft.org/OL-claim). American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO; 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202-879-4400; [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org).

## How are bylaws/operational procedures for SSC's determined?

Each School-Site Council determines most of its own operating procedures through the adoption of SSC bylaws. Each SSC is required to pass

bylaws to govern its operation. The bylaws must be approved by two-thirds of the BTU members in the school and by two-thirds of the parents who come to a parent meeting for which there must be at least two weeks notice.

The SSC bylaws must include the following operational procedures: how elections will be organized and conducted; when meetings will be held; the notice procedure for announcing meetings; who is responsible for co-chairing the SSC with the Principal and for recording minutes; what the system is for selecting alternates who have the same racial identity as the members they would be representing; the terms of office and how they will be staggered; and what the salary is in regards to members who fail to regularly attend.

The bylaws may also include provisions that address the following: what subcommittees will be established in addition to the Personnel Subcommittee; if a portion of each meeting is set aside for public comment by individuals in attendance who are not SSC members; how the SSC will inform the wider school community of its decisions and activities; where minutes will be posted and distributed; what the process is for amending the bylaws.

## What is the BPS Nondiscrimination Policy?

The BPS Equity Department details their policy in Superintendent's Circular EQT-4: "NONDISCRIMINATION Policy". The BPS states that it is 'committed to maintaining an educational environment & workplace where individuals of all backgrounds and experiences are welcomes, encouraged, included, & can flourish' by aiming to eliminate all forms of bias & bigotry in order to resolve that prejudice & disparate treatment will never impede their learners or educators.

The Circular explicitly states, "The BPS will not tolerate discriminatory behavior, including intimidation, threats, or harassment of employees, students, or anyone else who visits or is part of our learning community. Retaliatory conduct toward persons who have reported possible bias, discrimination, or inappropriate behavior, who have assisted in an investigation, or who have otherwise exercised their rights under this policy is also prohibited."

"Unacceptable conduct includes any action, including verbal or nonverbal communication, that contributes to promotes, or is passively or actively complicit in disrupting the districts inclusive learning & working environment. Derogatory or intimidating statements, threats, acts of exclusion, or other mistreatment regarding a student's or employee's membership in or association with a member of a protected group be tolerated toward students, members of student's families, employees, contractors, or other parties who support or participate in district programming." The afore mentioned circular details the various educational practices and programs included under this policy. The BPS states that they are committed to 'vigorously implement & actively enforce this policy to ensure that all of

its daily operations are characterized by fairness, respect, & equity.' Please refer to EQT-4 Superintendent's Circular for specifics & for more info email [bpsequity@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:bpsequity@bostonpublicschools.org).

## When is the BPS/City of Boston's Health Insurance Open Enrollment period to change plans for SY 2022-23?

The City of Boston's annual Open Enrollment for changes in health insurance plans is **May 2 - 20** for health insurance coverage effective July 1, 2022. Open Enrollment is your opportunity to enroll in or change your health insurance coverage. If you do not want to make any changes to your coverage, you don't need to do anything and your current coverage will carry over and continue during the next year. If you do want to make a change, add or drop coverage, you must submit an updated enrollment application on the Health Benefits & Insurance Division by (no later than) May 20th. If you are adding a spouse or dependent you will be required to provide proof of eligibility such as a certified marriage or birth certificate.

The Health Insurance opt-out program is June 6-24. Active employees, who were previously or are currently enrolled for at least 12 months who choose to receive coverage under another medical plan outside the City of Boston's group coverage, may waive their City of Boston plan and receive an annual opt-out payment. Based on your type of coverage the payment varies; single- \$1,000; family -\$1,500.

For more information, visit the City's website for active employees at [boston.gov/city-benefits](http://boston.gov/city-benefits) or for retirees at [boston.gov/retirees](http://boston.gov/retirees), or contact Health Benefits & Insurance at [hbi@boston.gov](mailto:hbi@boston.gov) or 617 635-4570.

## What is the role of the School Site Council's Personnel Subcommittee in hiring?

The role of the Personnel Subcommittee of the SSC is mandated to:

- 1.) Interview and approve the hiring of BTU teachers' bargaining unit staff, the in-transfer of BTU teachers' bargaining unit staff from other schools in the system through the transfer as well as inside teachers and outside applicants to the Open Posting lists throughout the entire school year.
- 2.) Approve the selection of Lead Teachers, [school based] New Teacher Developers, and new athletic coaches; and
- 3.) Determine the schedules and procedures for reviewing candidates for positions.

The Personnel Subcommittee is comprised of the Principal/Head of School/Director, two teachers and one parent as well as one student on the high school level [who are elected members of the SSC]. Decisions are urged to be made by consensus. Decisions need to be formalized by majority vote with the Principal/Head of School/Director voting with the majority. The decisions of the Personnel subcommittee are not subject to the approval of the School Site Council as a whole. **The Personnel Subcommittee is required to meet for all hires made from the beginning of one school year through the last day of the same school year.**

There is a way to involve others on the Personnel Subcommittee who poses more expertise in a particular position to be filled. Elected teacher and parent representatives on the SSC may designate temporary replacement representatives on the Personnel Subcommittee according to the positions being filled. These temporary replacement

*continued on page 7*

## Boston Union Teacher

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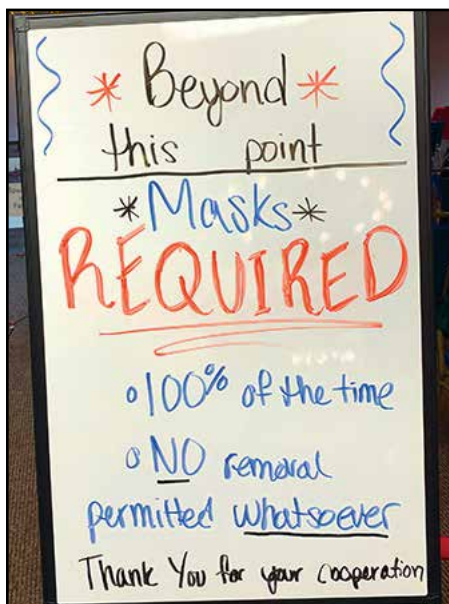
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All articles must be appropriate and exclusive to the publication, and in good taste.

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The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is September 14th.  
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# The Return of In-Person Meetings



After a two-year hiatus BTU members returned to Bayside for a meeting. Zoom was still an option but only those in person in the hall could vote. Attendance for the in-person meeting was at, or slightly above, 2019-2020 attendance rate.

In her opening remarks, BTU President Jessica Tang asked the members in the audience to raise their hands if they were new BTU Building Reps. After a round of applause, I sought out a few people who had raised their hands.

I spoke with Lily & Lesley from the Curtis Guild School. "It was very exciting to be all together for our first in person membership meeting! The experience was very empowering," they said.

Cortina and Christlene from the Carter liked being new building reps. "It's very interesting being a rep., especially now with negotiations." They said they like working at the Carter but that the hours make attending the membership meetings difficult.

For the meeting itself the hall was divided into three different zones. The zone closest to the speaker's podium was for people who wanted some social distancing and who wore their masks 100% of the time. The middle zone was for those who might lower their mask to drink water. The last zone was for those who wanted to eat some food at the tables provided against the far walls.



## Constant Criticism in the Local Press Helped Bring Down the Timilty

The following is a transcript of a Twitter thread issued by Ted Chambers, a physical education teacher at Fenway.

Read the Boston Globe piece [tinyurl.com/5n82kvf7](https://www.bostonglobe.com/5n82kvf7) by Jenna Russell about the rise and fall (and now closing) of the Timilty Middle School. And let's just say I have some thoughts to share.

After the meteoric rise and eventual fall of The Timilty and a similar narrative at Edwards MS in Charlestown, Jenna Russell & the @BostonGlobe show up 33 years later to do 'real' reporting & pose as advocates? Seriously? Why didn't y'all join sides w/ what works 25 years ago?

We (teachers, parents, admin, union activists & leaders) needed you decades ago. But @BostonGlobe chose the interests of wealthy, powerful, and

connected rather than stand w/ those who were "fixing" these "problems" and getting it done in the 1980's

You could have stood with us. Helped us fight for what worked. But instead the @BostonGlobe spent nearly 4 decades helping set [the] stage for the crisis we see happening today. Demoralizing teachers, blaming us & our union as obstacles of "progress". (Google: @GlobeLehigh and BTU).

Pushing negative narratives that run contrary to facts & voter attitudes (see: 2016 election results). Quoting charlatans, astroturfers, dark money, and 'stakeholders' who rep the rich and powerful or only their own paycheck. (See: any story mentioning Sam Tyler).

This piece rightly honors the many heroes of the Timilty – faculty and admin alike. It also clearly shows @jrussglobe is a very good writer. But let there be no doubt: what it does best is expose how cynical & craven the Globe is & has been re: teachers, our unions, & ed reform.

Over two decades the Globe could have written stories this good in real time – uplifting stories of reformers within the BPS who were fighting for real change, many of whom were BPS grads, people of color, or BTU/BPS veterans. Instead you still cynically marginalize these folks.

The @BostonGlobe ignores the educators who are DOING THE WORK in favor of a narrative of failure. The Globe sides with the folks who think real change for kids & families costs too much – who believe it is easier and more cost effective

to support a constant narrative of failure.

The Globe supports this narrative with quotes from those who blame teachers, our unions, or both – and choosing 'reforms' & narrative that disrespects us and demoralize us by suppressing the amazing work so many of us do on a daily basis. (See: @GlobeOpinion)

There are two sides to this fight: those who have been in the trenches for 30+ years trying to do the right thing, and then the rich and powerful trying to exploit the challenges of urban education for political or personal gain.

The Globe chose the wrong side. Thank you for finally telling the story of the amazing educators at The Tim 30+ years later. But sorry. You don't get to show up now trying to look like you have been on the right side all along.

# School Committee Watch Party



BTU President Jessica Tang



BTU Executive Board member Michael Maguire



Excel High School students Thy Nguyen



paraprofessional Melanie Miranda



ABA Toni Robinson



Young Achievers educator Chantei Avles



Jules Devasto



BPS student Kayla Quinlan

## Poetry Helps Ease the Pain

*There were times this year I thought it was only the Girl Scouts who saw us. Only the Girl Scouts who noticed what we did these last three years, who saw us sitting in cars crying a little bit before we put on our ID badges and our masks and went inside.*

*That one box of cookies meant a lot to me. This morning I heard Kwame Alexander read this poem on NPR as I was driving into school and I cried a little in the parking lot. Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Nurses, Custodians, we see you.*

From NPR radio May 31, 2022

We received over 300 responses, and NPR's poet in residence Kwame Alexander took lines from submissions to create a community poem.

This poem is dedicated to all teachers, but especially to Irma Garcia and Eva Mireles, fourth grade teachers who lost their lives at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

### Who Will Clean Out The Desks

Teachers make a dent.

A soft curve in the gray matter

A crevice where light shines in

a seed to germinate.

They open eyes

kick open Imagination

Make us see

encourage change of mind

and change of heart

NOT to force the walking of a single path

But the revelation of many.

Teachers make and shape

They weave through the constraints on their vision

Sponsor Message

creating and molding the students.

Teachers celebrate

Teachers conquer hate and foster expectation

teachers make light go

where darkness has resided

make chrysanthemums of wildflower seeds,

tall stems and fragile blossoms exploding in their reach.

They make statements that linger long after the lessons have been absorbed. Like Mrs. Tucker who wrote, "Amy is like a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day" on my first-grade report card,

Teachers bring forth dreamers and thinkers.

They make us Stretch

make us Wake up

Make us Realize compassion

Make us feel

Make us Cry

Make us Laugh

make us understand our Connection

make us grateful.

This is for Mr. Wilke

who taught Vocational Electronics

at Romeo High School in Michigan.

He helped make a creative mind

Crafted, molded and helped find

New interests and ideas, refined

To create new words, undefined.

Trips like Sisyphus each year,

Another journey up the hill,

Another class to teach,

Another state test to endure and stress over,

Another prom, graduation, homecoming,

Another break to look forward to.

Teachers are there despite it all

Even when the world makes you feel small.

Mrs. Hunney didn't do it for the money.

She saw I had potential,

even with dyslexia I could be Presidential.

You see, Teachers make bad days into good

Make the journey as meaningful as the destination

Make reading rewarding

make good trouble.

Teachers make decisions.

Around 1,500 per day.

What to say, how to say it, and when

Teachers make love

out of everything.



Teachers make me feel like I am special

like I am safe

Teachers make Sense

Of a jumble of eighth notes and

Then quarter notes

And a smear of dark chords

They make music.

On the day that he died, not just me but the whole school cried, "he's the reason I graduated" "he's the reason I ate lunch" "When my own dad ran out, he helped me so much" They'd honk as they passed by our house day and night, a constant reminder of his touch on their life

A teacher is nothing without a student

As is a farmer without a field

A mind rich with knowledge

A teacher is nothing when stripped of their power

As is a train when emptied of fuel

Censored and idle

We are here because teachers make students

From saplings to majestic Trees of potential.

They make us whole.

They make impressions

subtle hands that make themselves available

to guide us on this trail of woe

and wonder

Teachers leave the door open for us to walk through

but when the last bell rings

when the classroom is locked down

who will clean out all the desks?

The math worksheets

The missing LEGO,

the one goldfish cracker

the paper clips and crumpled post-its that say "I love you!"

the Pencil boxes and old erasers,

the one Pokemon card (Cramorant)

the empty glue stick,

the dusty Harry Potter mask.

the dirt-smudged backpacks?

At the end of the day

Who will help the teachers prepare for the next

Who will make a home for the heavy hearts,

for The sacred ones who can't stop thinking about those 19 desks,

those 19 backpacks

those 19 summer vacations,

those 19 new pairs of sandals.

those 19 next school years and school years after that

and after that and after that.

Teachers don't let us give up on the words

They help us find them

They help us find ourselves

Just breathe and keep being kind to children

is their mantra –

Who will hold them in kind and caring arms

when the world is not so beautiful

when the summer burns red

when there are no more children

to be kind to.

I say, Let it be us.

Because teachers matter.

# AFT MA Annual Conference



## The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts 2022 Annual Conference "Emerge Stronger"

The AFT-MA annual conference was held at the IBEW Local 103 Union Hall on Saturday, May 7, 2022. The theme was Emerge Stronger.

The conference opened with a Q & A with UMassBoston professor Maurice Cunningham, at right, who has written a book called *Dark Money and the Politics of School Privatization*. Every delegate received a copy of the book. It is a must read for all public school teachers.

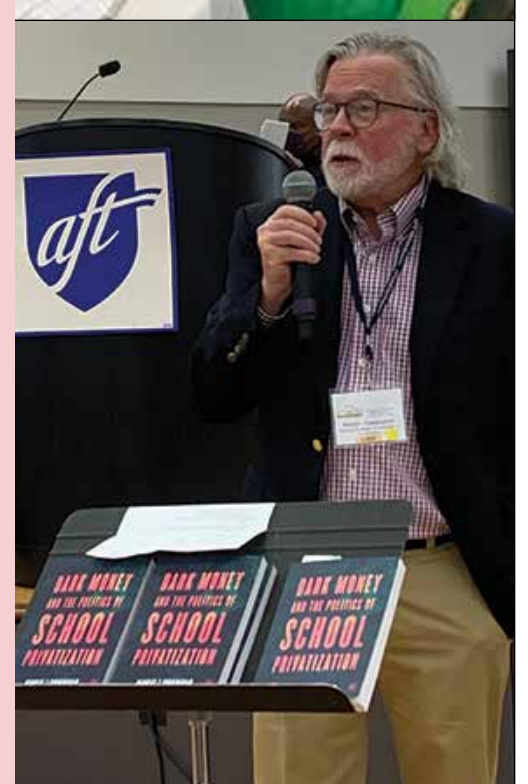
Two children of BTU members won scholarships. RJ Petrucelli, son of Carol Ann Petrucelli of the Condon, bottom right; and Maeve Gaffny, daughter of Caitlin Gaffny of the Tobin, bottom left; both won Albert Shanker Scholarship Awards.

BTU-RTC president Marilyn Flowers Marion, at left, won the Distinguished Service Award for retirees.

Tracy Curtin, bottom right, won the Under 35 Distinguished Service Award.

Kafunda Banks, third row center, won the School-Related Personnel Award.

Boston Arts Academy's Spiritual Ensemble sang.



## The Hidden Cost of MCAS: Why We Shouldn't Let the Test Dictate the Future

Standing outside my school in the morning, the brightly shining sun and chirping birds signal the start of that anxiously anticipated season here in Massachusetts. No, not spring; MCAS season. For many across the state, it feels like we have been building towards this for several months, if not all year. For teachers, this is understandable, as standardized tests like the MCAS have a direct impact on federal funds for schools. For students, however, the MCAS seems to loom over everything like Heartbreak Hill for marathoners. But does it have to?

I have worked in three different schools in Boston over the last decade (currently as a one-to-one paraprofessional) and one thing that has been consistent across all of them is standardized test anxiety. We describe the MCAS and other tests like it as “high stakes” and the students are acutely aware of that. I have watched excellent students break down in class under the pressure that they felt from simply having to prepare for the test. Some have even asked me if they’ll be held back if they don’t do well on it. While this is not the case for my 7th grader, it is for high schoolers. MCAS

scores are used as a hard barrier to high school graduation, and that is precisely what I take umbrage with.

As a tool that allows us to compare individual schools or even entire school districts, the MCAS works reasonably well. It creates a ubiquitous standard that can be used to compare these institutions to each other in an objective way. This can provide important insights into the efficacy of the educational systems and pedagogies that we put into place. However, when it comes to determining the success or failure of a student’s K-12 career, we really should take a step back and ask ourselves if this is the right tool for the job.

There are a myriad of issues with placing so much stock in the results of a standardized test. In addition to the effects on students’ mental health, there are some serious misgivings about the MCAS when it comes to equity. Many critics of the test argue that the MCAS tends to favor white, middle class students due to the ways in which it is developed. It also tends to challenge multilingual learners (MLLs) more so than their native English speaking counterparts. According to US Census data, Mas-

sachusetts has become more diverse over the past decade, making this a growing concern.

These equity issues do not only exist along racial or cultural lines either. Students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia or autism may also find themselves at a considerable disadvantage. And while there are in theory ways for a student who has a learning disability to circumnavigate the MCAS, this process requires a level of advocacy that few families can manage. Even for those who can, it is just another exhausting step in securing an equitable education for their child.

Furthermore, that pathway only exists for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which leaves out students who suffer from anxiety, depression or students dealing with complex trauma. Is it fair to them to deny graduation because they were not able to demonstrate their growth on a test that is administered only once a year, even if they have been able to show it using other forms of assessment?

For me personally, the answer is a resounding NO! Especially in a case where the answer is a simple one. If we decouple the MCAS from graduation

requirements, we can alleviate much of the pressure and anxiety that this test creates for our students while simultaneously making their education more equitable. It’s addition by subtraction, a concept that you may well find on the 7th grade Math MCAS. The way I see it, we as educators are required to spend an incredible amount of time and effort ensuring we are experts at assessing student learning. Using a standardized test to determine if the last 11 years of a student’s education were worthwhile is like taking the ball out of Tom Brady’s hands in the 4th quarter of the Super Bowl.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. By supporting organizations like Citizens for Public Schools as well as legislation aimed at reforming our educational assessments we can improve the lives and education of our students dramatically. In a world where we are increasingly seeing students as individuals with unique strengths and challenges, the idea of a standardized test gatekeeping graduation feels counter intuitive at best, utterly detrimental at worst.

*(Brendan Bean is paraprofessional at the Elliot K-8)*

### A GREAT GATHERING OF BTU MEMBERS AT FENWAY PARK, MAY 31, 2022. THE RED SOX UNFORTUNATELY FELL TO THE CINCINNATI REDS 2-1.





# Retired Teachers Chapter NEWS CORNER

Joan Devlin Secretary

Christine Buttiglieri, Data Processing Chair

## Improving Our Pension

The Legislative committee has been hard at work writing letters and attending meetings to encourage the City and the Retirement Board to raise the base used to calculate the Cost of Living increase from \$15,000 to 18,000. It is not too late to write to the City Council members and to the Mayor and ask for their support for this proposal.

The Retirement Board is expected to vote on the increase at their meeting in May.

### Retirement A New Beginning

Many active BTU teachers and Paraprofessionals are making the decision to retire from the Boston Public Schools. This is not an easy decision and the process of retiring can be overwhelming.

The RTC would like to help Teachers and Paras with some helpful tips on retirement.

If you are thinking about retiring in June or over the summer before the new school year begins, you want to explore your options. Everyone thinking about retirement should attend the seminars run by Michael McLaughlin. Michael is not only the Secretary Treasurer of the Boston Teachers Union, he is also an elected member of the Boston Retirement Board representing all Boston public employees' unions. These information sessions arm you with all of the information you need about what the process of retiring is and where you can find resources to assist you in gathering the information you will need. Michael McLaughlin of the BTU runs at least 2 sessions per year and they are open to both teachers and paraprofessionals.

A good place to begin your information gathering is by looking at your employee file maintained by Human Resources. It will provide you with the system's determination of your creditable years of service and the amount of money you have contributed to the retirement system. You want to check and make sure that all of your service is credited to you.

Regarding Medicare Part A and B, you need to apply before your 65th birthday or 3 months before you plan to retire. This is a strict requirement. If you do not apply before you

turn 65, you will pay a penalty in your Medicare premium. You should contact the Health Insurance office at City Hall for information. This office is very good providing information and assistance to members.

You can join the Retired Teachers Chapter and enjoy the benefits of continuing membership in the BTU.



The Retired Teachers Chapter has benefits that are only available to members. Dues for Teachers are \$5 per month and for paraprofessionals \$2.50 per month (12 months deducted from your pension check once your application is processed).

You can visit the RTC at the Union office. You can also call the RTC office with any questions on Wednesday or Thursday between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. (617-288-2000).

### New from the Eye Care Center

RTC members can now use their credit cards to pay for the lens and frames. Thanks to Roz Avant and Timo Philip

Chair of the RTC Benefits Committee for working with Michael McLaughlin and the Eye Care center director for making this possible.

### And we're back!

In person meetings of the Executive Board and a Spring business meeting start our Spring calendar.

The Business meeting will be a hybrid meeting, with some members choosing to continue the zoom meetings. Unfortunately, the hybrid meeting does not allow for zoom members to speak or ask questions, but the members will still hear the information from the committees as

well as a new program being offered to city employees both retired and active called Burn Along that has free on-line classes and programs in keeping physically fit, diet, yoga, and staying active.

The Spring Luncheon is scheduled for Thursday, May 19, 2022 at 11:30 am. at the Venezia Restaurant in Dorchester. Tickets are \$45 and are non-refundable. Seating will be limited and we encourage you to get your tickets early, especially if you would like to sit at a table with 5-10 others from your school or even if you expect to sit with one or two friends. No tickets will be sold at the door.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone this Spring. Please stay well.

**The RTC office  
is open on  
Wednesday and  
Thursday  
from 10:00 am  
to 2:00 pm.**

## Retirees Celebrate Spring at Luncheon

Marilyn Marion, Chair, Joan Devlin, Secretary

### Oh Happy May!

May 19th was a wonderful celebration and time to gather with friends as the RTC held its Spring Luncheon at the Venezia Restaurant in Dorchester. Everyone enjoyed themselves as they visited and caught up with friends that they have not seen in person in several years.

At the luncheon, the RTC presented Awards to Jeannie Turner and Denise Dwyer for the years of service to the BTU and the assistance that they provided to the RTC and its members. We wished great retirement years to both.

An award was also presented to Jessica Tang for her assistance in gaining an increase last year in the COLA base. Through her efforts lobbying Mayor Janey, she was able to convince her of the need to improve the pension payments by increasing the base on which COLA raises are calculated by raising the base from \$14,00 to \$15,000. In addition, Jessica has been involved in supporting all of the work of the RTC.

### City Offers New Dental Plan for Retirees

The city has engaged Metropolitan Life to provide dental insurance to all Boston public employee retirees. By now you have received information from the City's Health Insurance divi-

### BTU DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

This year there will be 16 scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 awarded to high school seniors who are **dependents** of BTU members. To apply, please obtain an application from Adrienne Washington at [awashington@btu.org](mailto:awashington@btu.org) or download the application from the BTU website at [btu.org](http://btu.org) and return with: 1) a transcript of the dependent's last two years of academic work; 2) evidence of acceptance by an accredited college, junior college, vocational school or equivalent institution; 3) member's notarized federal tax return for the year 2021; 4) a one-page statement of the dependent's goals. **The application and the four supporting documents must be received in the Union office no later than April 25, 2022.**

### RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, the Retired Teachers Chapter of the Boston Teachers Union awards three scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 to deserving high school seniors who are children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces or grandnephews of RTC members. One of these scholarships is earmarked for a student who chooses to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution.

Applications for these scholarships can be downloaded from the BTU website at [btu.org](http://btu.org) or obtain an application from Adrienne Washington at [awashington@btu.org](mailto:awashington@btu.org). **The deadline to apply is April 16, 2022.** Envelope must be postmarked by this date.

## Liability Coverage...

*continued from page 3*

ments do not need to be members of the SSC. For example, a special education teacher may replace a teacher on the Personnel Subcommittee when a special education position is being filled, only if the elected SSC BTU members [or parents] choose to do so. The administrator can not appoint people that they choose. It is up to the BTU elected SSC members to caucus on their own to elect the two that will be the BTU Personnel Subcommittee members. It is prudent to also elect an alternate in case one of the two selected is unable to participate on a particular day/time. BTU members are not obligated to select someone that poses a particular expertise that is a

BTU member to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee. It is entirely up to the BTU SSC members as a whole to decide this option on their own. They cannot be compelled to do so by the administration. The same is true of the parent members. SSC parents select their own member to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee as their representative by caucusing on their own to do so. On the high school level, the two elected SSC student members also select which one of them will serve as a member of the Personnel Subcommittee. There is a Superintendent's Circular on-line at the BPS website detailing the SSC Personnel Subcommittee's function and protocol. Please refer to it for details.

### Retiree Scholarships Awarded

The BTU and RTC offers three scholarships to family members of

*continued on page 11*

# 26th Annual AF-MA/BTU Statewide Paraprofessional Conference

by Michael Maguire



Colleen Hart and the BTU Para Council welcomed back the annual para conference after a two year hiatus. AFT-MA president Beth Kontos likened the renewal of the para conference to spring itself. “This is a time of new beginnings,” Kontos said. Kontos called for full funding for our public schools. She invited all to attend an upcoming Zoom meeting on May 25, 2022 promoting the Fair Share Amendment which would add a 4% tax on incomes over \$1,000,000.

“This proposal would add four cents to every dollar earned after the first million,” Kontos said. “This amendment would affect 30-40 families in Massachusetts but would add 1.5 to 2 billion dollars - that’s billions with a B - annually to fund our schools and to repair our infrastructure.”

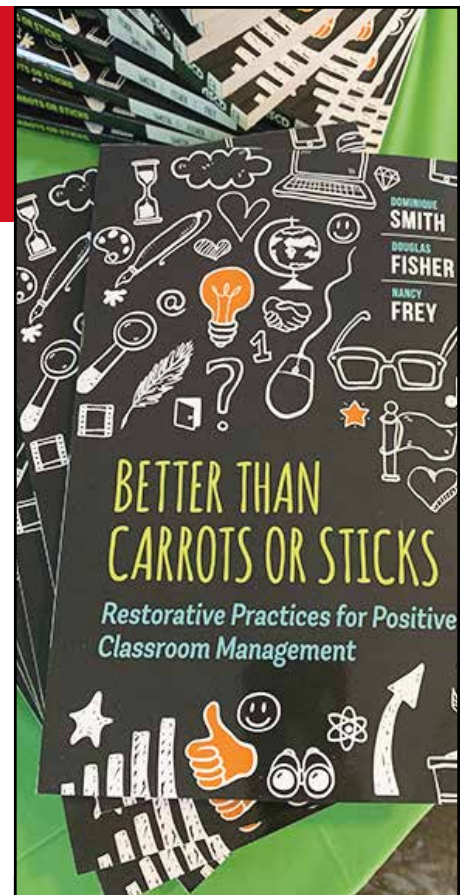
BTU president Jessica Tang introduced the theme of the conference: self care. “We need to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of others,” Tang said. Anecdotally, president Tang mentioned that she had recently flown on a plane with her young son. She reminded the audience of that familiar instruction from the flight attendants that should oxygen masks be necessary that you put on our mask first before assisting others. Paras give so much of themselves to assist students and teachers, but they must take care of themselves too. Tang said, “schools couldn’t function without paraprofessionals.”

Segwaying into our contract talks, president Tang delighted the crowd by saying, “there is no better way to show our appreciation than with a contract!”

The attendees next split into two groups, each rotating between workshops. One workshop was entitled Creating Space for Personal Well-being Through Adult SEL Practices hosted by BTU members Arthur Collins and Brenda Coaston-Lewis.

Lunch was also divided into two groups, while one group was eating, the other group participated in a yoga class. All participants received their own yoga mats as a gift so that they can continue what they learned at home.

BTU Paraprofessional and Substitute Teacher Field Representative Colleen Hart ended the session with closing remarks.





Commentary Jennifer Dines, NBCT

# Neema Avashia, Ethnic Studies Teacher, on Her Book Another Appalachia

what would it look to resist against an oppression that we're experiencing in our community and what are the steps that we take to understand and analyze and engage with our think about how we intervene against the systems of oppression.

Another Appalachia is an incredible achievement. How did you come to write this collection of essays?

I think topically what motivated me to want to write this essay collection was watching a lot of people in Boston gravitate towards Hillbilly Elegy, which is a book by J.D. Vance about growing up in Appalachia and the downfall of his family and how they fell into really difficult patterns around addiction and around job loss.

If you read his book, you would think that Appalachia was all white, all straight, all Christian, um, super homogenous, but my family's from Appalachia and we weren't the only ones, right? There are immigrants in Appalachia. There are queer people in Appalachia. I wanted those stories to surface. And so that was a big motivator for writing the book.

How has being a writer contributed to your sense of identity and well-being?

Especially when you're writing non-fiction, so much of what you're doing is making yourself whole on the page, so I think there is a way in which writing into that wholeness in my book also supports me in bringing that wholeness into my work in a way that hasn't always been easy being a queer person.

I think the level of safety that I have felt at my school around being out has increased over time but I think there was a long time in which I didn't feel

that safe. And it wasn't always clear that administrators would have your back if you were out. Like straight colleagues would have their wedding photo as the background on their computer and I was like yeah I don't think I'm going to be able to do that.

So I think in some ways like putting it out there on the page has made it so any kid can google me and find out everything about me. So I might as well

hope to become allies to queer teachers but aren't sure what steps to take?

Just the intentionality of including [the topic of queerness in the classroom] is more than a lot of people are doing. I think that does make a difference. Also, we have queer kids in all our classes. So what does it mean for us to create spaces that are affirming of all young people's identities?

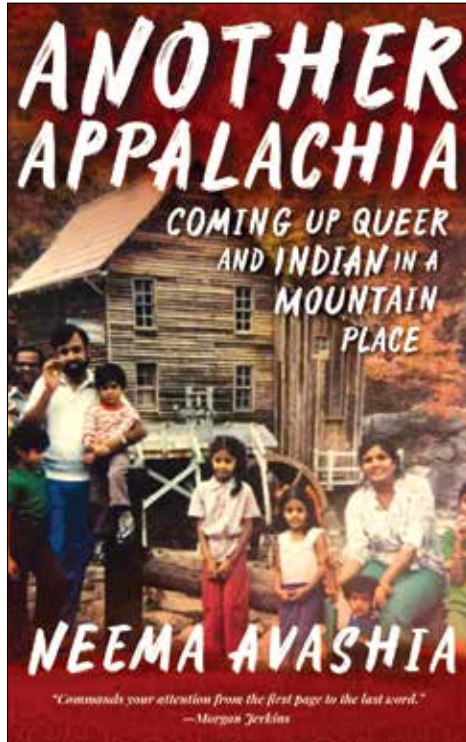
I think it's important for it to be the case that like whatever classroom you're in like the adults are talking about all the different ways a family can exist. And the whole range of ways in which families are like constructed. And that the books that you're reading in your class, no matter what classroom you're in, no matter what the identity is of your teacher, you're reading about queer characters, you're reading about straight characters. You're reading about black characters. You're reading about Asian characters.

The more responsibility that all of us take collectively for holding the identities in our classroom, the easier it becomes for any of us to exist fully in those spaces.

I've read your book, and I'm hungry for more of your writing. Where can I read more Neema Avashia?

You can always get Op-Eds from me about on WBUR Cognoscenti. That's where I rage, right? So I'm sure the next time there's a ridiculous thing happening in education, you'll find me there. But this summer my goal is to really hone in on my next essay collection which is called The Book of Broken Rules and is about what it means when you're the person who always doesn't do what they're supposed to do, which is the story of my life.

To learn more about Neema and her work, visit: <https://www.neemaavashia.com/>



be all of who I am at school too because it's already out there. So in some ways it's been really freeing, to say you can find anything out about me that you want to. I'm just going to be all of me, and you're going to be all of you. We're gonna just like figure this out together.

What would you say to teachers who

Teacher and author Neema Avashia currently serves as the Ethnic Studies Teacher at the BCLA/McCormack, where she has taught for nearly two decades. This spring, the West Virginia University Press published Neema's first book Another Appalachia: Coming Up Queer and Indian in A Mountain Place, a collection of seventeen essays that deftly weave personal narratives of family, culture, and activism with reflections on home, identity, and intersectionality.

## What does it mean to be an Ethnic Studies teacher?

Ethnic studies is a very new course in BPS and the idea behind it is to both support students in developing a sense of their own identities and the communities that they come from and being able to have kind of a systems analysis of oppression and resistance.

In this class, we first spend time having kids explore their own identities, their own intersectionality, the ways in which they experience hegemony and bump against it in our society and then moving into looking at case studies about how different communities have experienced oppression and how have they resisted it.

The last part of the course is about



## Retirees Celebrate Spring at Luncheon...

continued from page 9

retired teacher members. This year's scholarships were awarded to the following students (RTVC member sponsor in Parentheses): Azalea Thompson (Carolyn Moran); Ryan Marsh (Thomas Connelly) Olivia Sontag (Jean Silverio).

The scholarships will be presented at a June 11, 2022 luncheon at the BTU.

### AFT Convention in Boston July 13-17

Come be part of the national union's biannual convention being held in

person in Boston at the Convention Center in the Seaport. We are seeking volunteers to act as hosts at the convention, handing out information at our booth and answering delegate questions. It is wonderful to meet teachers from all over the country and to share our story with them. If you are seeking an interesting, fun activity this July join us at the convention. Volunteers are needed and you can schedule your time with the BTU/AFT MA Host committee.

There will be a reception for Volunteers at the Westin Hotel in Copley Square July 16. Buses will be provided from the convention Center.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact Michael McLaughlin at the BTU and sign on to help our fellow union members find their way around Boston. Guaranteed to have fun!

### Office Hours

Even in the summer, the RTC office is open every Wednesday and Thursday from 10 am to 2 pm to answer your questions or to update your information. If you move, change your phone number or email please call us so that we can update your information. If you don't tell us when you move we keep mailing to the wrong address. Ditto with phone numbers and email addresses. We do not give out your personal information to anyone.

Enjoy your summer!





# Remarks of Betsy Drinan at the Launch of the BTU History Project at UMass Boston May 3, 2022

You know, as I was thinking about what I would say today, I reflected that I think I have always been interested in local community history. As a child, one of my greatest wishes was that I could experience time travel. I wanted to know what my neighborhood looked like 50, 100, 200 years ago. I wanted to see who had lived in my house and neighborhood. I wanted to experience what life had been like, what people's lives had been like on my piece of the planet in years before I was born. As a teacher – particularly when I taught social studies, I tried to incorporate local Boston history into my curriculum searching out all sorts of resources and crafting lessons trying to really engage my students in the study of the experiences of the people – past and present – in their communities and neighborhoods.



However, the search for BTU history all started for me when I was elected Secretary Treasurer of the BTU in 2017 and started poking through drawers and files that were left from my predecessors. I unearthed some interesting things that captured my imagination. Handwritten minutes from BTU meetings in the 1940s before BTU was the official bargaining unit for

BPS teachers. A legal brief arguing for retaining seniority rights during the desegregation time period. The original BTU contract from 1966. After speaking with various people at the BTU and doing some preliminary research, I began to realize that there really wasn't much of an effort to preserve the history of the BTU and that, as the years went by, some understandings/experiences could be lost. I felt that would be unfortunate and I decided to see what could be done.

My good friend, John McColgan - Archivist for the City of Boston, put me in touch with Andrew Elder and others at UMass Boston archives – thinking they would be a good partner for efforts to preserve BTU history. Soon after, John,



Kristen Pinto from the BTU Retired Teachers Chapter and I met with Andrew Elder and Jane Becker at UMass to discuss a possible collaboration. One of the first initiatives was to connect with Carolyn Goldstein and discuss bringing one of the Mass Memory Roadshows to BTU – a BTU Digitizing Day – which would be an open call for all our members to bring artifacts to the BTU Hall to be photographed and documented in an effort to preserve items that our members thought important and valuable. There was also an opportunity to create short videos sharing experiences with the BTU and BPS. This event was a great success and spurred us on to do more.

In the fall of 2019 Carolyn introduced me to Nick Juravich, who had recently starting teaching Labor History at UMass Boston. It was a wonderful partnership from the very beginning! Nick is a wonderful human being and so easy to work with!

The BTU has maintained digital copies of its monthly newspaper Boston Union

Teacher on its website dating back to 2010, but that meant there were more than 45 years of newspapers not preserved! With the tremendous support of Adrienne Washington, long time BTU administrative assistant, we were able to search high and low and collect almost a full collection dating back to November 1963 - the edition issued right after President Kennedy was killed. We got a quote for digitizing the entire collection and with the support of the BTU Executive Board and a vote of the BTU membership, the expenditure to digitize everything we had, which included a user friendly search function, was approved. Once the digitizing was done, we made arrangements to officially donate these materials including copies of all of the BTU contracts and other documents to UMass.

The next phase of the project was to start doing oral histories – interviewing our members to hear their story of teaching in BPS and participation in the BTU. This has been my favorite part. Nick and I have had the wonderful opportunity to spend long stretches of time having conversations with members – hearing their stories - why they got into education, how they got involved with the union, what their experiences have been like. These interviews have illuminated so many issues such as the development of special education, the experiences of Black teachers going into South Boston to work during the busing era, the stories of the various strikes, BTU meetings back in the day and more.

We took a brief break from doing the oral history interviews but expect to be back at it soon.

I am so appreciative of everyone who has contributed to this project. I am looking forward to the presentations of Nick's students – among the first researchers to actually use the materials we have collected. And look forward to continuing to add material to our growing archives. You know, people always say how important it is to know our collective history so we are not doomed to repeat it. However, you can't know your history unless you collect it. That's what this effort is all about – collecting and preserving our common history. Many thanks to all.



**The Boston Teachers Union Collections at UMass Boston**

**Join us on Tuesday, May 3rd at 4pm for the launch of the BTU Collections at UMass Boston**

**University Hall, Room 2300**