Moving From Defense to Offense: The BTU 2023 Legislative Agenda

As we move into March, we are making moves to achieve our strategic priorities, including leading the narrative around our legislative agenda this year. As a reminder, this past fall we shared three strategic priorities for the upcoming school year. They are:

1) Build strong union structures at school sites.
2) Educate about, implement, and enforce the new contract.
3) Be more on the offense, rather than on the defense as a Union.

We have been very busy throughout this school year to continue building strong union structures, including ensuring that each school has Building Reps, Faculty Senates, and School Site Councils. For example, we are piloting a new three-part series of Building Rep workshops this calendar year to add more supports for Building Reps and organizers have visited dozens of schools to assist with and support Faculty Senates. We have also been supporting schools to both implement and grow new Inclusion Planning Teams, engage our activist list in planning for actions regarding pay issues, and encouraged more members to become Black Lives Matter at School advocates for activities during Black History Month.

To reach our second strategic goal, we have created a print and online resources as well as visited dozens of schools to educate about, implement, and enforce the new contract. The school visits are part of our Contract Coffee Hours, which will give brief presentation on highlights of the new contract, share an “plain language summary”, give an overview of the new special education inclusion language, share guidance and then answer questions. All schools in the first cohort of the special education Inclusion Planning Teams as well as the high schools have hosted BTU staff for the Contract Coffee Hours, and dozens more are being scheduled in the upcoming month. We are also launching a new contract explainer video and community meetings as well.

Moving into March, we are zeroing in on our third strategic priority, which is to be more on the offense, rather than on the defense as a Union. This includes leading the narrative around inclusion and what is needed, developing materials to make it easy for members to understand our priority campaigns, and new investing prospects in our relationships with community allies. It also includes filing and supporting proactive legislation that provides solutions for many of the challenges are members are facing whether it be addressing the COLA for retirees or replacing state legislation that allows for harmful school receivership based on high stakes MCAS scores. We have a robust list of priority legislation both locally and nationally.

For example, we are proud to be a part of a coalition of educator unions, families and community organizations that have put forward the Thrive Act. This legislation would end the practice of school receivership, dramatically reduce the harm caused by standardized testing, and provide local school communities with the resources students need to succeed. Our members have also been leaders in filing legislation that would correct the inequitable Retirement Plus transition, and nationally, our national affiliate is leading the fight to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO).

We are continuing to review the hundreds of bills filed at the end of January as we continue to lobby for the schools and communities our students deserve. Below is a list of our priority list so far, although we will continue to also support priority legislation as part of the AFL-MA and other labor affiliations and community coalitions as well. The list will grow in the next few months, and at the same time we will also need to grow our membership involvement to strengthen our electoral and legislative power to enact the solutions we are putting forward. Our power, as always, is in our unity and members, and it will take all of us coming together and lifting up our voices this year to move from defense to offense and win the legislation that we need and deserve.

These priorities were shared at the February membership meeting by BTU Political Director Johnny McNinis and BTU political organizer Roberto Jimenez, and the full list is still being compiled as we continue to review the thousands of bills filed both locally and nationally and meet with our allies and partners.

BTU Legislative Priorities List as of February 2023

**BTU Bills:**

- **Our City, Our Schools!**
  - HD 3162 (Haykins and Montano) / SD 2067 (Comerford) An act empowering students and schools to thrive [Thrive Act] in 2022, the BTU and our community allies successfully defended BPS from being placed in state receivership. We remain strongly opposed to receivership and other forms of state takeovers, in Boston and anywhere else. Research shows that takeovers disproportionately impact majority Black and Latina/o districts and punish educators for working in districts with disadvantaged populations.
  - There’s also an extremely poor track record for districts and schools that have been taken over. Like any school district in the state, Boston has room for improvement, but top-down, punitive, and ineffective state interventions that wrack control from parents and local communities are not the answer.

- **SB (Lewis): An Act establishing a special commission to re-imagine school assessment and accountability**
  - HB (Haykins)/SB 293 (Comerford): An Act expanding opportunities to demonstrate academic achievement that have spent over 20 years using MCAS and have only seen growth in the gaps between wealthy students and both low-income students and students of color. Research also shows the high correlations between parental income and standardized testing results, meaning that these tests are mostly a proxy for income and not a measure of a student’s achievement or potential. Using standardized tests has also been harmful to both students and educators.

- **SB (Lewis): An Act establishing a special commission to re-imagine school assessment and accountability**
  - HD 31594 (Conshol) / SD1049 (Miranda) An act relative to teacher retirement [Retirement Plus]

(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of general or special laws to the contrary, any member of the teachers retirement system or any teacher who is a member of the Boston retirement system, who (i) became eligible for membership before July 1, 2001.

**Solving the Educator Shortage and Supporting Educators of Color**

- **Diversity:** Boston Public Schools is one of the most diverse districts in Massachusetts, both in our student body and our faculty ranks. In fact, over a third of Black educators in Massachusetts teach in BPS! However, there still remains a huge gap between the population of students of color, who make up the vast majority of students in Boston and other urban districts, and educators of color, who are a minority even in Boston. We know that educator diversity is crucial for both students of color and white students. A report from the Learning Policy Institute outlines the benefits to students of color, whose academic performance is boosted when taught by educators of color. White students also benefit from educators of color because they are exposed to different perspectives and further learn how to navigate an increasingly diverse society.

- **BPS Retirement System:** BTU is committed to expanding the educator pipeline so we can address the existing educator shortage, and particularly to continuing to diversify the education profession.

**Licensure:** Our state licensure system remains woefully inadequate to support the needs of our students and the realities of the education profession. The MTELs present an unnecessarily high barrier due to the financial burden it imposes on educators, and prevent otherwise-qualified educators from becoming educators. There are also racial gaps in...
Notice to members running in the 2023 BTU election

THANKS for participating in the BTU election – Participation keeps our union strong and democratic!

Nominations are open until March 8th. Nominations can be made electronically (https://members.btu.org/login). These will automatically be submitted to the election committee. Nominations can be collected on paper, signature pages (available at the union hall) and MUST be submitted at the March membership meeting by the candidate or designee. All pages must be submitted at one time starting at 4:00 pm and ending at 6:00 pm or when the union meeting ends – whichever is last.

Candidates for full-time office, executive board, Paraprofessional council, and RTC are invited to submit a statement with a current picture to be published in the Boston Union Teacher newspaper. Candidates with a primary must submit these by March 12. For candidates who do NOT have a primary, statements must be submitted by March 21. Statements are limited to 400 words for candidates for full-time office and 300 words for Executive Board, Para Council, and RTC officers.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to put at the top of their statement their name and office for which they are running (counted in word limit). We expect the wording of a candidate’s statement will be printed exactly as received. Candidate statements shall be presented in alphabetical order by last name for each position. If a candidate statement is not received the candidate name and office will be listed with the words “No statement provided.” All submissions should be addressed to both saltiver@bts.org and mmonaques@bts.org.

Moving From Defense to Offense: The BTU 2023 Legislative Agenda...

continued from page 1

pass rates, and educators of color are less likely to retake the test, further harming educator diversity.

SB (Levis) / HB (Pichich): An Act relative to educator diversity

This bill, co-sponsored by the two Education Committee chairs, would establish an alternative certification to the MTEL by 2024 and provide safeguards for negative impacts of certification on candidates of color. It would establish an Educator Diversity Data Dashboard which would create greater transparency and set clear targets for the diversification of the educator pipeline, elevate the voices of diverse educators by establishing advisory Educator Diversity Councils in every district, and establish guidelines for diversity & inclusion and anti-bias trainings for staff and hiring committees.

Fund Our Schools!

With the passing of the Fair Share Amendment, we have successfully set up a funding mechanism for education at all levels. The BTU is committed to the timeline laid out in the Student Opportunity Act and will continue to advocate for all components to be fully-funded as soon as possible. Beyond that, we are committed to overhauling funding for our public higher education system so that it is accessible and affordable to all families in Boston and across the Commonwealth. This will not only ensure that our students are able to have successful careers, but that we can continue to meet the demand for critical professions such as educators, social workers, and counselors. Lastly, many of our members and community allies have felt the increasing cost of childcare deeply. For that reason, we are advocating for increased funding to childcare and early education programs. This will help reduce racial gaps in early education, which are magnified as children enter and navigate our K-12 system. Research shows that investments in early education have a very high rate of return in the form of benefits to children in the long term.

Safe, Clean, Healthy Buildings

From leaky ceilings to a lack of air conditioning, rickety bathrooms, old boilers, and windows in need of retrofitting, most of our buildings are not meeting students’ most basic needs. We have had members in classrooms where lead paint falls on them and their students. Our buildings are in disrepair; and so BTU fully supports the Green New Deal for BPS initiative. This is “our shared commitment to expanding access to safe, healthy, energy-efficient, and inspiring learning spaces, with state-of-the-art classrooms, cafeterias, auditoriums, and athletic, outdoor, meeting, and support spaces.” We are committed to being allies to BPS as they engage community stakeholders, renovate and develop new school buildings, and create the spaces that our students and educators deserve.

SB (Crighton): An Act modernizing school construction

The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the dire situation facing our schools, with access to a dignified retirement now more critical than ever. Unfortunately, as the cost of living continues to increase, especially in the last year, cost of living increases to pensions have not kept up. Access to a dignified retirement allows educators to enjoy their later years worry-free and continues to provide meaningful financial security and a dignified retirement.

Antiracist Curriculum

HB (Elugardo) / SB (Lewis): An Act relative to anti-racism, equity and justice in education

The BTU’s Ethnic Studies Now Committee has been working with the coalition that helped draft this legislation, which would promote the development of a statewide curriculum around a social justice perspective

continued on page 4

NOTICE
What is the BTU/BPS Program to Assist Teachers With a Less Than Proficient Evaluation Rating?

The Educators Support Program (ESP) is a partnership between BPS and BTU that offers coaching, support, and the opportunity for teachers who are not currently rated as “Proficient” on their evaluation. ESP offers two levels of support, the Peer Assistance (PA) Program and one is the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Program.

The contract language details: "Permanent teachers and provisional teachers in their third year who have received an overall rating of Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory and been rated Unsatisfactory or Needs Improvement on a Directed Growth Plan will be assigned a Consulting Teacher (CT)." After their initial meeting with the CT, they may opt into the Peer Assistance (PA) Program. The teacher will be informed whether there is space in the PA Program. During the plan, the CT will visit the teacher regularly to provide support, which may consist of observing, modeling, coaching, or any other support the CT and the teacher deem necessary.

Eligibility for the ESP program is being a third year whose last rating was reclassification and the “Advice” page will correct any factual errors found in the teacher’s record. The CT shall take place, and the group will visit the teacher regularly and provide coaching, peer evaluation, and best practices as well as share online resources like “Lesson Planning 101” at tinyurl.com/ESPESP.

The mission of the ESP program is to help teachers learn and develop. They are to be done, to wish one had. A second license to retain their current position through the Department of Education. The cost of the second license is $300.

Is there a discrepancy between the school-based evaluator and CT; or if both agree that the teacher is not making adequate progress are to the ESP [Educators Support Programs Panel]. The final three-way meeting must occur at least one month before the scheduled end of the plan.

"At the end of the plan, the CT will issue a summative evaluation with an overall rating. The PAR program will correspond with the CT and second-year provisional teachers receive mentoring beyond the first year. The ESP program also offers consultations visits if a teacher would like some feedback on their practice. ESP offers PD workshops on coaching, peer evaluation, and best practices as well as share online resources like “Lesson Planning 101” at tinyurl.com/ESPIESP.

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I am writing in response to what I see happening in Florida schools: the banning of books, and the government’s attempt to control curriculum and to dilute subject matter for fear it might make students “uncomfortable.”

In philosophical circles the word “critical” has a specific meaning, referring to the understanding of a concept from various points of view. It also requires discerning the agenda(s) of those who proclaim a particular truth about a subject, person, or ideology.

Once that agenda is made clear, the ideology is not necessarily abandoned. But an important fact is now open for discussion. Critical thinking is an important topic involving the studies for the premise, idea or theory. It is not an attack, or argument, or a way to improve, a particular ideology. Rather it is an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the intellectual and social milieu which gave birth to the idea.

One of the most influential fields of the 20th Century was proposed by Sigmund Freud. The pleasure principle, a compensatory personality theory, and the power of the unconscious are key elements in his well known tripartite architecture of the mind: Id, Ego and SuperEgo.

Does it help us to know that Freud was born in 1856 in Victorian Europe, was 15 years when Darwin published his Descent of Man, and the Newtonian world of causality was not yet challenged by Einstein’s theory of relativity? Darwin placed humans in the animal kingdom. We are here due to the long search for a “biology of the mind.” And now I know that there is movement up must come down. Freud used that same logic and told us that everything that goes down must come up.

How can I describe a natural middle class male influenced by Darwin’s evolutionary theory and this analysis only deals with the intellectual climate surrounding Freud. We have not touched his personal and family life.

Does gaining a critical understanding of Freud nullify all of his insights? Perhaps not, but it gives us deeper knowledge of the man, his environment and his writings. The more deeply we investigate a topic, the more we see its connection to other topics, acceptable worldviews, and a critical understanding requires an open environment. Preciously accepted knowledge is a bridge, an indicator of the existence of new ideas. The study of our previous understandings brought us to our current state of commitment to continue to search for understanding.

When teachers are asked what they enjoy most about their jobs, rarely do we get responses like: my students learned the multiplication tables, or my students know all the state capitals. More often we get responses like: my students gained a greater understanding of a concept, or they learned the value of investigating a topic.

I had the opportunity to interview a group of Boston 8th graders who were constructing portfolios of their work. When students completed their portfolio presentations, I asked them the following question: Can you point out an event, a unit of study or a lesson you have learned that has changed your attitude or understanding of the world? One student was very clear about his transformation. He used to look at things as just things. A chair was a chair. But then I learned about atoms and particles. And now I know that there is movement up must come down. Freud used that same logic and told us that everything that goes down must come up.

I teach high school students and my approach to Pandora’s box of technology is to invest time and attention in our students’ growth and learning and come after the students trust that their teachers know and appreciate them. Building a strong relationship takes time. Like a financial investment, we start out slowly and steadily build. When done right, the rewards are rich indeed.

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The Open Letter to the Boston Schools Superintendent

An Open Letter to the Boston Schools Superintendent Mary Skipper

by Theodore Loska

The following is an open letter originally sent to Superintendent Mary Skipper on November 1, 2022. To date Mr. Loska has not received a reply.

Dear Superintendent Skipper:

While I am addressing this letter to you, I am under no delusions that you will actually read it. It is understood that upper level management has staffs who screen letters like mine and make sure you do not have to ‘waste time’ reading commentary of what you perceive as a low position or influence. That has never stopped me in the past, and is highly unlikely to do so now.

I am concerned with the state of our arts and athletic opportunities as presently available in Boston Public Schools. Our students are extremely interested in and eager for what it is to come to these opportunities. Your hometown Arlington High School, for example, offers twenty eight athletic teams, more than twenty five performing arts classes— including orchestra, band, and drama. There are fifteen visual arts classes and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced public high school, Boston Latin, to shame. Boston Latin offers “only” fourteen music classes and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced schools and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-resourced class and eleven different foreign languages. This puts our best-
Para Leadership and Family Engagement in the Blackstone Walking School Bus

By Paul Tritter, BTU Director of Professional Learning

In 2019, educators at the Blackstone were focused on improving attendance. While long commutes and inadequate transportation can get in the way of regular and on time attendance the attendance team noticed a different problem. “We are a huge school that has students from every part of Boston but we are also a neighborhood school,” said Emmie Leostakos, and many students who lived within walking distance of school were chronically tardy or absent. “We thought that if we could offer families and guardians another solution then some weight would be taken off of their morning routine and alleviate a stressor in their lives.” said Emmie Leostakos.

The team applied for and received a BPS/BTU Teacher Leadership Fund Grant, to create a “Walking School Bus” an increasingly popular approach nationwide where school based educators walk with students to school. Walking School Buses can benefit student physical health, improve relationships, and increase on time attendance. When the pandemic hit, for obvious reasons, the team pushed back the implementation of the project by one year. However, when schools reopened the program became even more necessary than before as students and families needed to recapture the routines of daily school attendance.

Along with her colleagues Karla Rolon, Amber Bennett, and Anuedy Navarro, Leostakos identified 15 Blackstone students who were chronically absent and invited them to join the program. It wasn’t perfect right away, but engaging with families made it a success. “This project had so many highs and lows, however ultimately this project was about about listening to families and their needs. At the end of the day, as educators our first job is making sure students get to school safely and on time. If they are unable to do that, then they are unable to learn.” Another key was leveraging the leadership of Blackstone Paraprofessionals who were essential to the project’s success. And was it ever successful! All of the students who participated in the program showed increased overall attendance, and the walking school bus was always on time.

Leostakos and her team are hoping to continue the program into the future and believe it is a great way to connect with families and build relationships with benefits beyond attendance. Asked what advice they have for other schools who want to try a walking school bus, the team was clear, “We urge other teams to trust their gut, trust their students, trust their families and then figure out what needs to be done!”

Boston School Committee Chair Jeri Robinson came to the BTU Hall on February 8, 2023 to express her regret that BTU members are still awaiting either their back pay or proper pay adjustment or both. In a heartfelt talk, Chari Robinson thanked the teachers, paras, and nurses for their dedication to the children of Boston.
Boston Teachers Celebrate the Winter!
HAPPY LUNAR NEW YEAR 2023

Happy Lunar New Year 2023
THE YEAR OF THE RABBIT
National Board Certification: Worth the Effort

By Anne Slater

A few years back, in 2017, I decided to work towards National Board Certification. My friend Whitney Weeder, grade one teacher at the James Otis and NBCT since 2005, had been telling me for years. The benefits include a 4% pay increase, reimbursement from BPS/BU for the program costs and an opportunity to earn graduate credits if you complete the certification. There is also a nice ceremony at the School Board Meeting with recognition from the Superintendent. So I signed up for Literacy: Reading-Language Arts-Early and Middle Childhood. I thought, I'll just bank it and get it done in a year. Then the pandemic hit.

I achieved the National Board Certification this year and I am proud of this achievement. But I will admit it was harder than I thought it would be. I mean, I like writing and the bulk of the work is reflective writing. I made some mistakes along the way. Here is some advice from my experience and from NBCT Cohort leader Kerry Ann O’Rourke and Kelly Garafolo, National Board readers mentors.

1. Don’t do what I did and try to do it all in one year. I have to complete the components and it is better to space them out.
2. Read all of the directions before you start each component. I thought I had some great projects with students, but I had to retro fit them into the requirements which made it harder for me.
3. Use I statements like: I assessed, I evaluated, I adapted. You get a point for each statement of a clear instructional move.
4. Read to understand how the different components are weighted. This will help you allocate the sum of your scores and a weighted average.
5. Join a cohort through the BTO, if you can.
6. Ask for a reader from BTU/NBCT.

Kerry O’Rourke, grade 2 teacher at the Mather and NBCT cohort leader: “One thing you need to know about achieving National Boards is it does not mean you are an expert, but that you are an accomplished teacher that strives to never stop learning and improving one’s practice.”

It’s important to belong to a cohort because the National Board process is unique in many ways, and can be intimidating at best. Meeting with a cohort of your peers is a time to think through your own process with real-time feedback.”

Kelly Garafolo, NBCT Reader, Exceptional Needs Early Childhood to Young Adulthood, Certified 2010, Boston, MA.

“The National Board Certification process is a truly authentic and rigorous professional development process. It places your knowledge of students at the forefront of all of instructional decision making. It takes place within your own classroom and is a clear ongoing reflection and assessment. For me, it was the most relevant and impactful professional development experience I have had in my career. I am grateful that Boston Public Schools and The Boston Teachers Union continue to invest in developing and supporting teachers through this experience.”

Lesley Abuy, K2 teacher, Edison K-8:

“I think the process is very good to do once you are well into your career to keep you reflective and up on current research. It requires you to complete the certification process and it takes commitment and effort to do it but it definitely beneficial to your career, I think, because of the reflective piece.”

National Board Certification was designed to recognize and retain teachers who are accomplished in their fields. The process is voluntary and has great impact, direct and indirect, on students in Boston and across the country.

This process not only affirms, but also improves a teacher’s practice. It often changes the way students view teachers and who they voted for. And whether they are drivers or health care workers or police officers or teachers, the National Board Certification program seeks to increase the numbers of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in Boston. National Board is a process designed for teachers to demonstrate, through standards-based evidence, the positive impact they have on student learning and as a result of their deep and abiding understanding of standards, content knowledge, pedagogical practice, ongoing reflection, and participation in learning communities. National Board Certification empowers teachers and raises the status of accomplished teaching in a demonstrable way. It paves a path for teacher leaders. Our program seeks to connect teachers in Boston to the resources they need to complete this process and become NBCTs.

The BPS/BU National Board Program offers multiple resources and support. One is the National Board Certified Teacher Leadership Team (NBCT LT) which consists of five NBCTs: Margaret Arlauskas, Quayisha Clarke, Cristina DeGuzman, Suzanne Gill, and Benadette Manning. They work to organize candidate support with no-cost, online workshops and information sessions.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten reactivated the President Joseph Biden’s State of the Union address:

“President Biden may have been speaking from the U.S. Capitol tonight, but he could have been sitting at any of our kids’ dinner tables. He spoke from the heart, directly to the American people, particularly to those left behind or who feel invisible. He made that his North Star: making people’s lives better, in an economy that works for all, in communities that are safe for everyone and in a world where sustainable democracies can thrive over autocracies and war. Most of all, Biden challenged us to hope and dream, and to set a new course.

“His record, while still unfinished, is remarkable, and it gives us a launching pad for a more perfect union: massive job creation, an infrastructure bill that broke from the heart, directly to the American people, particularly to those left behind or who feel invisible. He made that his North Star: making people’s lives better, in an economy that works for all, in communities that are safe for everyone and in a world where sustainable democracies can thrive over autocracies and war. Most of all, Biden challenged us to hope and dream, and to set a new course.”

“AFT President Weingarten Reacts to State of the Union
AFT Celebrates Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) celebrates Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action. This week, the AFT highlights the importance of addressing systemic issues that our students of color go through. It's a call to action. "It's a call to action. It's a call to action. It's a call to action. It's also an affirmation that tells students, 'We're fighting for you.' And it's a call to action."

The AFT hosted a virtual student panel on reimagining school safety, exploring the demand to increase from the 3% COLA. Meanwhile, the Chicago Teachers Union hosted a virtual student panel on reimagining school safety, exploring the demand to increase far exceeded the $25 monthly increase adopted by the BTU. Other educators are displaying book collections featuring Black excellence and Black history, creating systemic issues that our students of color go through, "I'm also an affirmation that tells students, 'We're fighting for you.' And it's a call to action."

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Another issue is the lack of Black history in social studies texts, and how to teach about Black history in a way that is authentic and engaging. The AFT has created a toolkit to help educators teach about Black history in a way that is authentic and engaging. The toolkit includes lesson plans, curricula, and other resources to help educators teach about Black history in a way that is authentic and engaging.

AFT Dependent Scholarships

By Joan Devlin, RTC Secretary Marilyn Marion, RTC Chair Jacknay Frank

Our New Year's resolution to find a way to get to your tables together. We want to accomplish done is proving harder to achieve than we planned. Some issues have been resolved. During the pandemic, remote learning was particularly hurt by rising costs. With a limited 3% COLA increase adopted by the Board of Retirement and that increase only on the first $15,000 of a public employee's base, those retirees in assisted living facilities were faced with rental increases that exceeded their income forcing cuts in basic living expenses. A COLA increase of 5% for the fiscal year 2023 (still on the $15,000 base). The Boston Retirement Board finally voted to raise the additional 2% retroactive to July 1, 2022.

We are awaiting Mayor Wu and the City Council to formally approve the two laws that punish public employee retirees by limiting social security payments that were earned and paid for by the retiree. The GPO will not pay social security was earned and paid for by the retiree. The GPO will not pay social security was earned and paid for by the retiree. The GPO will not pay social security was earned and paid for by the retiree. The GPO will not pay.

We ask all active and retired members to call, write, email or text your Rep., Senator and urge them to pass this legislation. We need pension reform now.

At the Federal level, we are fighting for a full repeal of two laws - WEP and the GPO. These two laws punish public employee retirees by limiting social security payments that were earned and paid for by the retiree. The GPO will not pay social security to the spouses of deceased public employees, even though the social security was earned and paid for by the deceased spouse. You can sign the AFT petition at:

- HR, R2 - Social Security Fairness Act of 2023  
- https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/social-security-fairness-act-2023
- AFT phone advocacy tool  
- https://actionnetwork.org/call_campaigns/represent.png

Thinking About Retiring?

By Jacknay Frank, RTC Legislative Committee Chair

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Boston Arts Academy

Boston Arts Academy is a unique pilot school that requires an audition for admission and serves approximately 500 students in grades 9–12. Its newly renovated home is a modern four-story building with big glass windows overlooking Fenway Park and the MGM Music Hall. The cafeteria and library are located at the entrance, and large bronze images from ancient cultures around the world hang on the main staircase walls. Whiteboard-covered hallways invite hand-written inspirational quotes, drawings, and displays of student artwork. Each floor has a different Arts focus: Dance, Theater, Music, or Visual Arts at one end; academic classes at the other.

A Word Wall with visual arts vocabulary differentiated by grade level fills one side of a whiteboard in Kathleen Marsh’s classroom. After drawing self-portraits, ninth graders are learning about form, observation, texture/pattern, and process as they create 3D terracotta heads based on the Ife tradition — an activity that parallels a unit of African art. Ms. Marsh has taught at BAA for 25 years “because as a staff we have continued to ask hard questions, push our practice, and put the students first.”

Surrounded by instruments, Chris Rivelli checks a ninth grader’s Music Theory assignment. In a large room with tables covered with a wide assortment of colorful fabrics, Elisabetta Polito’s students are working on a variety of fashion designs — from petal notions to ironing finished pieces. In one classroom six students practice synchronized dance moves, while two girls independently review lines for a sketch of a theater production. In another classroom creating a budget worksheet for their pop-up business. What he appreciates most about BAA is the support of “experienced, knowledgeable, and accessible administrators and mentor teachers who foster creativity and build a collaborative culture.”

What supports do you have at YOUR school?

I was in Mr. Blank’s Creative Writing class. We are creating a song and I was trying to figure out what notes to play. Writing lyrics is challenging because my creativity is expressed more through music than with words. In this class I’ve learned to be more open-minded, recognizing that I can use my awareness of things going on around me in my writing.

— Kemoni Cartwright, Grade 12

I was in my music theory class, where we have been learning to find the intervals between each scale. I was showing Mr. Rivelli my work to make sure I had the notes right. An interval is the space between each note, which is easier to understand on a piano.

— Luiza Barros, Grade 12

This is in AP Biology and I was looking at nutrition labels with Mr. Binjour. I was surprised to find out how much information they contained. We’re doing a biochemistry unit, learning about the chemical properties of biomolecules and how our bodies use them.

— Juliet Lerner, Grade 10

I am the Finance Manager for the products we’re designing in our Fashion Tech class and I’m asking Mr. Mendoza to check my budget worksheet. I think it’s interesting that, as high school sophomores, we’re learning what it takes to run a real business out in the world!

— Juliet Lerner, Grade 10

We are on the marketing team and we’re writing down possible brand names for our product. We’ve learned how to get customer attention with eye-grabbing fliers, develop “customer personas” of our target audience, and create a social media account to promote the business.

— Zoe Gillispie & Jules Martillo, Grade 10

This is in our Fashion Tech II class, where we’re doing a “Big Business” project. Amelia is working on creating a prototype patch for one of our products, sweatpants that students might wear, while Nix (Project Manager) is looking on. Last year we learned about the history of fashion; this year we are learning how to create and market a Pop-Up Shop.

— Amelia Wolcott & Nix Johnson, Grade 10