

Happy Holidays

From the BTU Executive Board and Staff

BOSTON TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 66, AFT
180 Mount Vernon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02125



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Permit No. 52088

Boston Union Teacher



The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union, AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO • Volume 56, Number 3 • November-December, 2023

President's Report Jessica Tang

"Fall" into Election Season!

For many, the changing colors of the leaves and crisp cool weather signal our transition into fall. For many others, these same signs are reminder that fall is also election season!

One of our strategic priorities over the last couple of years has been to strengthen our electoral and political engagement. Voting in elected leaders who support public education and labor unions has never felt so high stakes. On the federal level, there is a candidate running for President who wants to dismantle the Department of Education and undo Title 1 funding. At the State Board of Education, members appointed by the former Governor Baker continue to threaten receivership of the Boston Public Schools. Locally, we count our City Councilors to approve funding for our schools and for our contract. Who we elect—from federal to local elections—absolutely impacts what happens in our schools and communities.

That is why we are asking all our members to remember to vote for our endorsed candidates each year. These candidates have filled out our questionnaire, interviewed with our Committee on Political Education (COPE) members, and have been approved, by 2/3's vote by our Executive Board and hundreds of members who attend our monthly meetings. We know we can count on our endorsed candidates when it comes to advocating for our schools and students as well as for our members, whether it is increasing the COLA base for our retirees, or whether it is getting the THRIVE Act passed.

It also means contributing to our COPE fund so that we can help our endorsed candidates win. We ask that teachers consider donating \$2 per pay period and that Paras contribute \$1, but really, anything helps. Thanks to the Citizens United Supreme Court

decision, elections have become increasingly expensive, and that is why we have to step in to help candidates who can't fund their own elections because they are working people, not millionaires or billionaires. This is why for the first time, we are setting up our own IE PAC, starting small, to help with priority candidates who need a little extra help.

In addition, we need more of our members to give just one or two hours in a week to help candidates door knock and phone back. Earning name recognition, sharing values and platforms, but also reminding people to get out and vote is important as well! We hope that you will consider joining the new BTU Electoral Action Team (the BEAT!) to help ensure that we can elect leaders who will build power with our educators and communities and fight for the schools and communities our students and educators deserve.



Jessica J. Tang
BTU President

Bottom line, fall may be the season for apple picking and pumpkins, but it is also the season for spicy elections, and we need you and your support to ensure our electoral and legislative programs are successful!

Please contact our new political organizer **Lee Nave** lnave@btu.org or Political Director **Johnny McInnis** jmcinnis@btu.org to get involved and remember, when you feel that cool autumn breeze, it's time to take political action.



We had a **GREAT** turnout for our Paraprofessional Informational Meeting/Resource Fair on October 19th!
See more photos on page 5.



Why You Should Join the Solidarity Committee

When workers are under attack, what do we do? Stand up and fight back!

When I think of the word “solidarity” my mind usually goes to this chant. I love showing up to rallies, I love chanting until my voice is gone in class the next morning, and I love when unions in our community show up for the BTU when we take action. For me, one of the most important aspects of being in a union is the way it allows, encourages, even demands us to make connections with other workers. Particularly as educators, it is imperative that we stand in solidarity with workers who are in the midst of a contract fight or public campaign. Why is this so important?

First, because all of our struggles are connected. We may be in different unions, but we’re part of the same movement. And don’t think the bosses aren’t looking at what one union was able to win when they sit down to negotiate with the next. It’s commonly known that whatever contract gains we make in the BTU are gains that other city workers, such as firefighters or librarians, can more readily demand when they come to the table. And vice versa! Similarly, we’ve seen educators in Brookline, Cambridge, and beyond use the BTU’s contract wins at the negotiation table, and seen our union leaders show up in support. Recently, Vice President **Erik Berg**

spoke about the issue of caseload limits for inclusion specialists at a Cambridge Education Association contract rally.

Second, because as educators, we have a uniquely important connection to our community. Every good-paying job that we help workers in Boston fight for is another good-paying job for our students and their families.

Back in 2019, I was lucky enough to get to stand in solidarity with one of my students, a 12th grader, when he and his Stop & Shop colleagues went on strike. One of the strongest ways we can combat the housing crisis and low pay faced by too many BPS students is to provide all the support we can to them, union-to-union. In my opinion, a stable home and a stocked fridge does more for a student’s learning than any school can.

That’s why the BTU Executive Board voted to form the Solidarity committee this summer. The goal of this committee is to help coordinate BTU turnout in



Cecil Carey
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

- In Mansfield with UAW workers as part of an ongoing stand-up strike at a Stellantis factory
- In Newton with 0 the Newton Education Association as they fight for a new contract

We’re in the process of creating this new committee and improving the way the BTU goes about turnout. The work of this committee will be in helping spread the word, coordinating logistics, and most importantly, showing up! If you’re interested in getting involved, fill out the interest form available at this link: tinyurl.com/BTU-Solidarity or reach out to the author (ccarey@btu.org) or Director of Organizing **Natalia Cuadra-Saez** (ncuadrasaez@btu.org).

solidarity actions in the Greater Boston area in consultation with BTU staff and elected leaders. So far, we’ve helped the BTU show up for contract actions:

- In Norwood and Somerville with the Teamsters
- In Boston with striking writers and actors in SAG-AFTRA

Letter to the Editor

Teachers Turning the Page

During my thirty years as a school teacher in Roxbury, MA; a student and later professor of reading and culture at three graduate schools in the Boston area; as a BPS principal of K-6 schools; and as a lifelong student of teaching and learning I have gained some insights that I would like to share some insights:

As teachers of young emergent readers we must:

Observe their social and academic interactions in the classroom. How do they behave with one another? What books do they choose? What do they like? Take precise notes, and interpret those observations (Habits of mind. The teachers and the students are both learners.)

Visit the student’s homes to create a connection between home and school (linking self, family and society). Try to understand their worlds from their own experiences.

Use the interpretations (data) to teach children from what they know. **The data quickly unveils that learning is specific, one size doesn’t fit all.** The data also shows that learning how to read or learn content, mainly rests on children’s cultural, historical, and biological factors. Reading/Writing depends on language. Language depends on social negotiation, it is innately collaborative. If a teacher spends an hour talking with the students about a book, she or he will be building

content knowledge that is crucial for learning, especially reading/writing and analyzing.

It was so clear to me that language determines literacy outcomes. When educational systems decide the sequence of learning, without teachers input, a strict focus on phonics, or a rigidly taught curriculum program, some children will do well and some won’t. For those children who don’t have the language/culture of the group, learning becomes an insurmountable barrier which leads to failure. In a quest to find the magic solution to the literacy conundrum, districts change the curriculum very frequently, then, if the new curriculum is phonics based, those children who could use language to support their learning may learned some phonics but will lag on the language proficiency to support their acquisition of reading/writing skills.

This is where the stubborn achievement gap resides. It feeds itself from the reading wars, constant changing of principals with new approaches, teachers pushed to change again without a clear understanding of the what and why, and a revolving door of literacy experts telling them how to do it.

This is what I observed in my 30 years in the district.

– Olga Frechon
Retired teacher and principal

A Notice to Membership

At the November Membership Meeting, the membership will vote on a proposed bylaw change, which would revise the bylaws to add a new provision as follows:

“The Executive Board, by two thirds vote, may sanction any BTU member who is elected to a leadership position who is found after investigation to have violated the AFT/BTU Code of Conduct or BTU Non Harassment policy. Sanctions may include but are not limited to removal from office, position or from the Executive Board.”

Health and Welfare Information

The Board of Trustees of your Health and Welfare Fund provides you with a generous and valuable package of benefits. Your health and well-being are important to us, and that’s why the Fund’s health and welfare benefits were designed to supplement your City of Boston medical coverage.

These benefits are provided by the Boston Teachers Union Health and Welfare Fund and are funded by contributions from The Boston Public Schools.

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*Teachers Only

The Fund Office also handles:
COBRA (within 1st 18-24 months of lost coverage)
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Phone Numbers:
617-288-0500 – Teachers
617-288-5883 – Paraprofessionals
617-288-0497 – Prepaid Legal
617-288-5540 – Eyecare Center

Health & Welfare Fund Fax: 617-288-0522

Health & Welfare Fund Office Hours

Regular Hours:
Monday-Friday / 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Summer Hours:
Monday-Friday / 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Eyecare Center Hours

Regular Hours:
Monday-Thursday / 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM
Friday-Saturday / 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Summer Hours:
Monday-Friday / 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Website: www.btuwhf.org

Location:
180 Mount Vernon Street
Boston, MA 02125

In Memoriam

Mary Jane Drinkwater

DRINKWATER, Mary Jane of Milton, MA, passed away, on October 3, 2023, after a long and very courageous fight against Melanoma. She was born March 7, 1943 to parents, Leo Francis Drinkwater and Anne McCarthy Drinkwater. Mary Jane, or Jane as her family and friends called her, was a graduate of Emmanuel College, earned a master’s degree, and then later on, a Juris Prudence Doctorate from New England College of Law. Shortly after graduation from law school, Jane passed the Bar Exam and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. In the early days of her career, Jane was a highly regarded elementary school teacher in the Boston Public Schools System, primarily in the Roxbury area. She was a devoted teacher with high expectations for her pupils and one who earned their respect because as one young man said, “she was always fair”. Gradually, Jane moved on to become a school psychologist, focusing on students with special needs, in particular those with visual impairments. Jane brought both experience as a classroom teacher and her psychology background to manage these new challenges very successfully and in 1993 was awarded School Psychologist of the year by the Boston Public School System.

Where is the Training to Empower School Site Council Members



Caren Carew
BTU Secondary
Field Representative

Get empowered – knowledge is power! The BTU and BPS have set the following dates for SSC training that all elected (BTU, administration, parents and high school students) SSC members and BTU Reps as well as any BTU member are invited and encouraged to attend. This is an interactive process that brings SSC members from attendees to active informed participants. Workshops will be virtual on Zoom from 5:30-7:00 pm. Please RSVP to register for a workshop at ccarew@btu.org. The flyer link will be in the BTU e-bulletin. Each workshop is held twice. Stay tuned as additional sessions will be held later in the school year.

- **SSC 101 – SSC Intro overview:** November 2nd and repeated November 13th.
- **SSC 102 – Budget Basics:** December 11th and repeated December 18th.
- **SSC 106 – Personnel Subcommittee:** November 20th and repeated January 22nd.

What is considered 'corporal punishment' in BPS?

Referring to Superintendent's Circular LGL-20, **'Corporal Punishment':**

"Corporal punishment includes but is not limited to the following:

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

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

This information may seem self-explanatory, but we all should be mindful of the moments in the hallway when a challenging student isn't moving in the direction so told, isn't sitting down after repeated requests to do so, is behaving in a manner that is confrontational or overly playful, will not extricate themselves from a potentially volatile situation, etc. It is in these moments that our intellectual filters can slip and exasperation or desperation can rear its ugly head resulting in a momentary lapse which in some cases can result in ruining one's career. Even if there have been no repercussions for previously putting one's hands on a student, it is just a matter of time that there will be. When in doubt, do not touch at all. If the act can't be construed into corporal punishment, it could be interpreted as sexual harassment. There have been many BTU staff who've found themselves in the hot-seat discipline wise over what they honestly viewed as an inconsequential or innocent act. Re-reading the list (above) is a good exercise in prevention.

What do I do if I'm injured on the job?

Even if you feel as if your injury is relatively minor, one never knows if there may be complications later, so please immediately fill out **City of Boston – Worker's Compensation Services – Report of Occupational Injury or Accident** found in *Superintendent's Circular HRS-PP7, Workers' Compensation Procedures*. You can download it from the BPS website or get a copy from your school secretary or nurse.

All work related injuries must be reported as soon as possible, preferably within a day of the accident. The Workers' Compensation Service is on the 6th floor, room 613 in Boston City Hall. To contact a Case manager there call 617-635-3193.

If your injury requires emergency services you should go to the nearest emergency care facility, make sure someone completes the accident form mentioned above for you or contacts the Workers' Compensation Department within 24 hours. Do not assume this has been done, follow-up on it when able. The written reports can be hand delivered or mailed to the address listed above or faxed to 617-635-3119. If some of the info asked for on the form is unknown to the person filling it out for you, it should be left blank and the form should still be sent in to Workers' Comp. A supervisor's signature is required on this form only to inform them that the injury occurred and does not mean that they either agree with the contents of said form or that they witnessed the accident. Always keep copies of everything for your own records.

Your first follow up appointment after the emergency care must be with one of the City's preferred provider medical vendors. The list of these sites is in **Superintendent's Circular HRS-PP7**. You will be contacted by a Workers' Comp. representative as a follow-up to the report you filed, to explain the process, and to make sure you are getting the necessary medical treatment. If you are not contacted, call the number listed above to insure they are in receipt of your accident report. Always make sure you write down the date, time, to whom you spoke and what they said. Failure to do so lessens the efficacy of follow through later should a dispute arise. This is also the case when dealing with BPS Office of Human Capital. If your accident is not an emergency, your first scheduled appointment must be with one of their preferred providers as listed in the circular **HRS-PP7**. If you do not do so, you may then be charged for the service. Please see the circular for more specifics about Workers' Comp. If you have been out of work and have been approved for Workers' Comp. benefits, and then are able to return to work, you must obtain a medical clearance from your doctor releasing you. You will then receive a return to work release card from Workers' Comp. Even if your injury isn't serious, it's always better to be safe than sorry to document the injury – fill out and submit the form.

What should I do if a student makes suicidal statements, gestures, or actions?

The BPS Superintendent's Circular concerning **'Suicide Prevention and Intervention'**, details a precise set of policy guidelines, prevention and intervention strategies which must be followed precisely by all staff members of the school. While the responsibility of the school administrator to 'provide leadership in addressing the issues of suicide prevention and intervention,' all staff must be 'knowledgeable about the purpose, members and process for making referrals to the Student Support Team (SST),' and be 'familiar with suicide symptoms and

report same to the building administrator in a timely fashion.'

If an act of self-abuse or destruction occurs, emergency medical treatment is the primary need. The actions required by **ALL** staff persons are to contact the Principal and school nurse, not leave the person alone, remove anything that they could use to harm themselves, and initiate first aid if possible. The Principal must follow Superintendent's Circular on medical emergency management, contact Superintendent's office and parent, and complete reports. The nurse is required to initiate medical procedures, accompany student to hospital, remain until parent arrives or as long as possible, inform principal of student's condition as well as when the nurse is leaving the hospital.

If student has made self-threatening gestures or statements an emergency eval at a hospital/mental health clinic may be needed. The action required of the staff on the scene is to contact Principal, take the situation seriously by never ignoring or underestimating a suicide threat, remove person calmly but firmly from any immediate means of hurting self, remain a clam good listener never leaving person alone, follow instructions of Principal. The Principal must contact parent and request them to immediately come to school, consult with appropriate SST members to discuss referral to external support agency, and submit required reports. Parents are to immediately come to school, bring student to their doctor or referred mental health agency, and urge them to provide school with follow-up info from medical provider in order that school better meet student's needs. If parent refuses to come to school or cooperate, Principal should contact DSS hotline and student is kept at school until DSS arrives. Child abuse and neglect

procedures should be followed along with filing a 51A, and notify Superintendent's office. If parent can't be contacted after 2 hours, DSS should be contacted and under no circumstances should a student in such a situation be allowed to go home. All students who exhibit/express suicidal symptoms should be referred to external agencies with trained and experienced suicide prevention staff.

All students returning to school after a period of absence are required to bring notes signed by parents. Students returning after emergency suicide intervention treatment should bring documentation from medical/mental health provider indicating that student is able and safe to return to school. All returning students should first report to school nurse or Principal who will review medical letter and file it as part of students' confidential mental health record, accompany student to homeroom for readmission in a sensitive/confidential manner, inform Principal/guidance/SSC of students return, and bring case to SST for review and assignment by Principal of an internal liaison to monitor re-entry and serve as person staff reports re-occurring warning signs to. If a student is unable to return to school due to being unable to receive documentation to do so due to medical/mental health issues following such a crisis situation, they are served by provisions of the Home and Hospital Instruction.

What are the newly negotiated class sizes?

Grade Level:	Column 1: Class size for schools with an overall student population as of 10/1 with 6.5% or fewer students on IEPs	Column 2: Class size for schools with an overall student population as of 10/1 with more than 6.5% of students on IEPs
K0	20	20
K1	22	20
K2, Grade 1 and 2	22	22
Grade 3-5	25	23
Grade 6-8	28	25
Grade 9-12	31	28
Resource Room		
Teacher Caseload	25	25

BTU Phone Numbers

Office617-288-2000

Health & Welfare.....617-288-0500

AFT Massachusetts.....617-423-3342

Function Office617-288-3322

Lounge Office617-288-3322

Vision Center617-288-5540

Tremont Credit Union.....781-843-5626

Boston Union Teacher

Boston Teachers Union,
AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

EDITORIAL NOTE:
The *Boston Union Teacher* is published ten times a year September - July, inclusive.

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WHEN WRITING:
All correspondence to the *Boston Union Teacher* must be typewritten and include the author's name and school or department if not school-based. All articles must be appropriate to the publication, and in good taste. Letters to the Editor should be sent to letters@btu.org

DEADLINE:
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is December 20th. All copy should be e-mailed to ccarew@btu.org and aslater@btu.org. This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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BTU and Community Partners Rally Behind Thrive Act at State House Hearing

By Brendan Deady, BTU Communication Assistant

Months of collaboration between the Boston Teachers Union, The Massachusetts Education Alliance, AFTMA, BPS students, parents and educators from across the state coalesced into a powerful collective voice calling for improvement to the state education system at the statehouse last month.

During more than eight hours of testimony in support of the Thrive Act before the Joint Committee on Education, BTU members and community partners provided detailed first-person accounts of how the threat of state receivership and the MCAS graduation requirement has dismantled school communities, marginalized students and shackled teachers to a narrow test-focused curriculum.

The Thrive Act is a bill that the BTU and its education justice partners are making a legislative priority moving forward. The bill would replace the MCAS graduation requirement with an evaluation system created with local community input that focuses on a student's grasp of coursework material. The bill would also end the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) ability to take over individual schools and entire school districts to implement failed reform policies.

At this time there are three school districts in receivership: Southbridge, Holyoke and Lawrence. All three districts, despite the state's efforts, remain in the bottom 10 percent of school performance based on DESE's current evaluation system which heavily weighs raw MCAS test scores. DESE has used receivership as a threat to pressure school districts to implement vague policies to overcome deeply entrenched challenges along condensed timelines— a tactic that led to an improvement plan agreement between the Wu administration and DESE last summer.

"School receivership has become a cudgel the state wields to push ill-defined policies along unrealistic timelines that don't reflect the character or true needs or solutions of the communities they're supposed to support. To be clear, our educators want accountability and want to know that they are having a successful impact on our students. However, the current system is not doing that" President **Jessica Tang** testified.

Two Boston Public Schools are under state control: the Paul A. Dever Elementary School and the Up Holland Academy. Nikita DeBarros is an Occupational Therapist at the Up Holland Academy and testified before the Committee that the working conditions imposed within a school under receivership-which override many of the rights all educators experience under the BTU contract- have significantly damaged the school community.

"I work with all grade levels and interact with dozens of staff members on a weekly basis and, year after year, I have watched talented, dedicated educators make the difficult decision to leave our school community- not because they want to, but because they cannot sustain working 45-50 hour weeks while making significantly less money than what they would at a school down the street," DeBarros testified

Bailey Morse, a first-year teacher at Dever Elementary, testified that receivership silences teachers who want to advocate for a better environment for students or who have experienced legitimate work place abuses. Morse also added that because of the payscale in place at those schools, it deters teachers from continuing their own education.

"I repeat, the teachers at our school, responsible for educating future generations,

will not be compensated for becoming more educated, more well-rounded teachers," Morse testified.

The state has targeted high-poverty districts that have a large number of students of color for receivership, many of whom speak English as a second language and have complex learning needs. These students are evaluated with an MCAS test that they must take in English, resulting in skewed test scores that the state uses to justify disruptive policies that harm the students the state seeks to help. Multiple teachers at the hearing testified that under the current test-driven curriculum, children are being robbed of comprehensive curricula that reflects their lived experiences.

"We need autonomy and the freedom to adapt our teaching methods to meet our students' unique needs without the fear of administrative backlash," **Ibolya Toth**, a BPS teacher, testified.

Under the Thrive Act, districts with low MCAS scores would be designated to receive increased financial and administrative support. The district would convene a committee of local stakeholders that would formulate an improvement plan informed by direct experience with the students in need. The plan must tackle the root causes of the school's challenges, examine resource inequities, and include evidence-based programs, such as smaller classes, one-on-one tutoring, and community schools. Following a public hearing, the school committee would approve each plan before submitting it to DESE.

The State Education Committee will now vote on whether to report in favor of the bill, advancing towards a full consideration by the state House and Senate. Sixty-nine members of the House and 19 state senators have signed on as co-sponsors of the Thrive Act and if the Education Committee truly wants to pass legislation in the best interest of its constituents, it will advance this bill.



Bailey Morse

Ibolya Toth



Photos from the Paraprofessional Informational Meeting/ Resource Fair



Commentary Neema Avashia

Why Our Newly-Won Parental Leave Policy is a Radical Change for BTU Members

When I became a teacher, I learned an important rule by observing those around me: spend your sick days wisely, or not at all, and you'll be able to take a year of paid time off when you have a baby.

I hoarded accordingly, went to work sometimes on days when I definitely should not have, and had over 300 sick days available to me when my partner and I found out that we were going to have a baby.

But when I went to investigate the parental leave policy, I realized that what I had understood to be a general rule did not, in fact, apply to me. That while birth-giving parents could access up to 18 months of leave using sick days, those parents who did not give birth were limited to the 12 weeks offered by the city. All of my hoarding, it would seem, had been for naught. Adding insult to injury, when communicating with HR about how to put in for leave, I was told that I needed to apply for "paternity" leave, since maternity and paternity were the only two options, and I was not the person giving birth. The policy, and its

associated language, literally rendered my identity as a parent invisible.

Put simply: the previous parental leave created classes among parents. It assigned greatest value to parents giving birth, and communicated to everyone else—fathers in straight couples, queer and trans mothers and fathers, parents who came to parenting via adoption or surrogacy – that they mattered less. In straight, two parent families where both parents were BPS educators, the policy even went so far as to dictate which of those parents could be at home with their child during the first year of life – whether that is what the adults wanted, or not.

Which is why last year's contract negotiations – which changed the policy to be one that clearly states that all parents are equal, regardless of how they come into parenting, and that they have access to the same 12 weeks of paid parental leave, and 12 months of leave that can be paid if you have the sick days to cover it– feels so radical to me. Through this new contract, my parenting, and the parenting of all of us who come to

parenting without being the people to give birth, became visible and valued.

Because of the changed policy, I was able to be at home with my partner and our baby for the first five months of her life—from late November to late April – and again now, for the six weeks leading up to her first birthday. It meant that instead of running out the door to go to work every morning when she was just three months old, and consistent access to sleep was still out of reach, I got to return when we were sleeping better, when we were better at taking care of both ourselves and her, when we had all physically and emotionally recovered from the postpartum roller coaster.

It meant that, when you include summer break, I've been able to spend nearly nine of my daughter's first 12 months of life strictly for the purposes of extending care – care to her, care to my partner, care to myself as I come into this new identity as mother.

It meant that my partner and I got to learn how to parent together, and make decisions together, instead of making independent decisions during the time

we were caring for her, and then having to resolve discrepancies when together. We are stronger partners, and stronger parents, for having had this time.

It meant that we've been able to spend time with our families, and to help our baby build strong relationships with them, despite the fact that they don't live in Boston.

It meant that we've all been present for her "first" – first solid foods, first words, first steps. Precious milestones that you only pass once in parenting a child.

We have a confident, secure, hilarious baby. People in our neighborhood know her by name because she says hi with such enthusiasm whenever we pass them on the street. When we go to the music class, or to the library, or to visit friends, and we set her down on the floor, she speeds away and doesn't look back. Because she is fully attached. Because she has learned, during this year, that we are consistently here for her, and that if she goes away, we will still be here when she comes back. And that consistent presence, in no small part, is thanks to the revised parental leave policy.

The Early Morning Zoom Meeting I Never Want to Miss: BPS/BTU Dyslexia Working Group

On a Tuesday morning drive into work, I will myself to stay present in the moment, to focus on the flavor and texture of a single sip of coffee, to breathe to the beat of the Megan Thee Stallion's "Anxiety" on the car stereo, to admire the changing colors of the autumn leaves from trees along Walk Hill Street.

But practicing mindfulness on a school day remains a constant challenge. As a reading specialist at the Mildred Avenue K-8 School in Mattapan, I collaborate with SLIFE, inclusion, and substantially separate teachers to ensure that all students receive quality language instruction.

And this work confronts me with tough questions at every single turn: How can we ensure that our most marginalized students access complex texts during ELA? How should we structure our WIN blocks to make sure that our more advanced students have cognitively demanding tasks? How do we develop a plan for providing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for, say, a SLIFE newcomer from the Dominican Republic who stands out from the rest of her newcomer classmates due to slow processing speed and troubles with short-term memory during Spanish language instruction?

None of these questions come with readily supplied answers, and, as the sole reading specialist on the various teams I serve and the nature of bouncing from classroom to classroom throughout the day, sometimes I feel a little isolated at school.

By 7:30 am, I settle in at my desk, coffee nestled on a napkin beside me, and click on the zoom link in my google calendar for the Dyslexia Working Group's weekly meeting. The tension in my jaw starts to release as I see the faces of Boston Public School's most dedicated language teachers pop up on the screen. As Group Facilitator Sarah Jay, the BPS Executive Director of MTSS, leads a discussion on best practices for family communication around MAP scores, group members populate the chat with questions and links to resources. I bathe in the warmth of community. Sure, it's just another zoom meeting, but everyone here speaks my language: the language of passion for top-notch literacy instruction across our district.

I joined the Dyslexia Working Group in the spring of 2021 at the behest of **Steve MacCormack**, a reading specialist at the Haynes EEC in Roxbury. At the time, I served as the ESL 1 SEI teacher at the Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School. I had earned my reading specialist license in 2014, but BPS had few, if any, dedicated reading positions at the time, so I continued working as a special education and ESL teacher. At most of the early meetings, I voiced my frustration over and over again that the district had taken very little action to address the reading needs of students.

Sarah Jay, the group's sole non-BTU member, listened patiently as Steve and myself along with Dearborn Reading Specialist **Steven Benjamin** and Bilingual Speech Pathologist

Caroline Legor offered up our harsh criticisms of the district's inaction as well as our demands for better services for our students. During the summer of 2021, Sarah Jay found stipends for us to complete a Literacy Flowchart, a comprehensive document of assessments and interventions available for BPS educators to address MTSS organized by various areas of language including phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. Since 2021, group members have authored, facilitated, and revised a series of district-wide professional development sessions as well as created guidance documents to drive literacy instruction forward.

Since the early days, the group has evolved into a wider community of educators, including reading specialists, special educators, school psychologists, and ESL/SLIFE teachers. As a middle school teacher, I used to feel alone in my anxieties about struggling adolescent readers, but the group has helped me to find a whole crew of teachers serving this age group, including **Chris Baumgarten** and **Weddee Neufville Henry**, reading specialists at the Kennedy Health Careers and Boston Day and Evening Academies.

We have gained most of our new Dyslexia Working Group members through word of mouth. **Chelsea Unis**, a special education teacher at the Curtis Guild Elementary in East Boston, joined after hearing about it at a LETRS training last year and feels energized that so many people in the district are having the same conversations around literacy. **Kelly**

Garofalo, a reading specialist at Brighton High, heard about the group from Equitable Literacy Coach **Debbie O'Shea** during a Problem of Practice discussion. I told **Ami Isham** of the Mel King Middle School about the Dyslexia Working Group at a StudySync training after we shared the same concerns about implementation, in spite of the fact that I work at a traditional school whereas she serves students with IEPs for behavioral needs.

Because of the Dyslexia Working Group community, I have more solutions and resources at my fingertips, and, best of all, I no longer feel that I have to go at my work alone.

For the 23/24 school year, all members of the Dyslexia Working Group share the hope of drawing all BTU members with a fire in their bellies about combating illiteracy to our work. We meet on Tuesday mornings from 7:30 to 8:30 on Zoom, and, even if you can't make that day or time, we would still love to find a way to connect. Please email sjay@bostonpublicschools.org for more information.

★★★★★★★★★★

Want to learn more? Join BPS educators from the Dyslexia Working Group on Zoom to hear how they are supporting the literacy development of all students in their classrooms and schools. The Dyslexia Working Group is a collaboration of school-based and central office educators who meet weekly to discuss and create foundational literacy resources for the BPS community.

<https://tinyurl.com/DWGconnect>

Why Inclusion Has To Be Done Right This Time

By **Katelyn DeLaRosa**

Boston has a deep history of educational segregation. The busing crisis in 1974, which was almost 50 years ago now, drew national attention and is known as a major part of our history. However, segregation has been part of this system since its inception. But, are these moments behind us? Our recent data on the rate at which we place Black boys and multilingual learners into substantially separate learning environments presents us with a picture that doesn't look very different in 2023 than it did in 1974.

The BPS has recently submitted a multi-year plan for inclusive education that aims to change the way we operate and create equitable outcomes for all Boston students. In presentations and conversations, district leaders, including Superintendent Skipper, express the sentiment that **each of us as individuals didn't create this reality, but it is absolutely us as individuals and as a collective community who are responsible for making it right.** This recent district wide focus on inclusive education will have new planning, strategizing, and funding behind it. But that's not going to be the secret sauce that makes it work this time.

One of my favorite TedTalks is by **Simon Sinek** on the Golden Circle which is also described in detail in the book *"Start with Why"*. The main takeaway is that people need to know and believe in the **WHY** in order to achieve success. The Golden Circle is made up of three rings – the outside ring is the **WHAT**, the

middle ring is the **HOW**, and the inside ring is the **WHY**. The idea is that we should start in the inner ring and work our way to the outer ring - move from the **WHY** to the **HOW** and finally to the **WHAT**.

We may have been thinking about inclusive education backwards until now. Previously, we have started with the **WHAT**. We have asked ourselves, "What are we trying to do in BPS? What is the goal of inclusive education?" The answer was that we are going to include students who have IEPs and who are multilingual learners into classes with their peers because the research says this approach works and all students (including those without disabilities and those who aren't multilingual learners) achieve at higher levels when the classroom is inclusive. Awesome answer – this is a worthy and noble goal to work towards!

Then we started thinking about the **HOW**. And to be perfectly honest, I think we've been stuck on the **HOW** ever since. The **HOW** needs to take into account staffing, space, transportation, IEPs, systems that assign and enroll students, budgets, and so much more. All of these overwhelming details are needed before even talking about the very important **HOW** to teach in inclusive classes. How do we educate all students and provide all of the support and resources they need all at the same time, all day, every day? We continue to ask ourselves, "How does this look in action? How do other districts do this? How will we know when we are doing it right?"

The **WHY** for inclusivity in Boston

Public Schools is something so deeply known to some, and for others there is little to no awareness of the inequities that have existed since public education began. The disparities in programming, facilities, and resources between schools in White neighborhoods compared to schools in Black neighborhoods became more evident and were already fought against by prominent community leaders in the 1960s and 1970s leading up to the busing riots. However, today, we still see those same disparities in programming, facilities, and resources when we examine the demographics of students in schools by neighborhood and in the secondary school options we offer in Boston. We also still see prominent leaders fighting against these disparities with little change. We can't operate like this anymore. Whether you fully experience the oppressive structures built long ago, or you are just starting to pay attention, this time we all must commit to change. The vision has been communicated. The train has left the station. Now it's up to us to make sure it stays on track.

We can't pretend to not see the data that clearly shows that we continue to segregate students. In BPS, Black male students are 3.13 times more likely to be identified with an emotional impairment and placed in a substantially separate setting than their peers, and multilingual learners are 2.5 times more likely to be identified with a communication disability and be placed in a substantially separate setting. There are no excuses for this.

Although we all have areas to improve

and always will, I believe in Boston educators. We have seen the exodus from teaching that has taken place across the country in the past few years and yet, you are still here. It's awful that people were driven to leave a profession they prepared for and likely enjoyed very much at one time, but **you are still here for a reason, a purpose, a mission.**

We should get excited and be proud of ourselves for being in this moment and being part of the movement that will change the history of education in Boston. We are working as a system – departments, schools, unions, classrooms, homes – together for the same **WHY**. A **WHY** that is for all of our students, especially the Black and Brown children and Multilingual Learners in Boston who deserve so much more than what they have been given thus far, and to be included!

I know I am an optimist but I have also been around long enough to also be a realist. The timeline is ambitious, but this is not an all or nothing initiative. We will need to focus on progress, not perfection and on quality over quantity. Day by day, school by school, class by class, student by student, we will get to a place better than where we started and we can't go back. This is the time and the opportunity to get it done and get it done right. We can get to a place where inclusive education is not just an initiative but instead is the standard. Imagine the feeling of knowing your effort, your influence, and your school inclusion plan changed the history of education in Boston. That gets to be us, so let's do it right.

Challenging 'Up South' Boston: Roxbury Forum Recalls the City's School Desegregation Movement

By Chris Lovett, Special to the
Dorchester Reporter, October 4, 2023

They marched, they protested, and they gathered detailed proof that the Boston Public Schools were racially separate and unequal.

When a stubborn school committee failed to acknowledge the problem and provide remedies, parents and activists organized one-day boycotts, carpooled, and raised money for student transportation to more adequate schools. They even opened their own "freedom schools" to surmount barriers of low expectations. These were the actions taken by people in Boston's Black community between 1963 and 1974, a period of more than ten years before school desegregation was ordered by Judge **W. Arthur Garrity** in response to a federal lawsuit filed by Black parents in 1972. Overshadowed by the turmoil and strife that came after the ruling, that earlier history took the spotlight in a forum last month at Roxbury Community College sponsored by the Boston Desegregation and Busing Initiative. "This is a much different narrative from the one that has dominated over the last fifty years," said one of the forum's panelists, **Zeb Miletsky**, author of the recently published *"Before Busing."* "Like all Bostonians," he said, "these parents paid the city taxes and were entitled to a quality education for the children from its public school system, a constitutional right, something which they had been denied."

That point was made to the Boston School Committee – with 14 demands for remedies – by leaders of the Black community. They included **Ruth Batson**, the Roxbury parent and co-chair of the Boston NAACP's Education Committee, and **Paul Parks**, the other co-chair, an engineer and activist who would later become the state's first African American Secretary of Education.

Batson's presentation took place after years of advocacy, but little more than one month after shocking news reports around the world showed non-violent demonstrators against racial exclusion in Birmingham, Alabama, being attacked by police dogs. Many of the demonstrators were of school age, taking part in a "Children's Crusade" against segregation. With its prominent roles for young adults and children, the civil rights campaigns in the south would resonate with parents and activists in Boston. Little more than a month later, after threats in response to desegregation of the University of Alabama, President **John F. Kennedy**, in a televised speech, called for new laws on voting rights, educational opportunities, and access to public accommodation. The speech aired on the same night as the presentation to the Boston School Committee, and the night before the assassination at his home in Jackson, Mississippi, of the civil rights worker **Medgar Evers**. During the Sept. 26 forum, the north-south connection was even more explicit when the audience saw an excerpt from the recent PBS documentary, "The Battle Over Busing," in which longtime activist **Hubie Jones** – the dean emeritus of the Boston University School of Social Work – singled out the showdown with the school committee as the point when the civil rights movement came to Boston.

Speaking at the forum, Jones said that on arriving in Boston for post-graduate studies, he saw "patterns of discrimination" that ranged from Boston's public schools and public housing to the police and fire departments, even to a dearth of Black people in jobs interacting with customers at downtown department stores. "And they were almost invisible as a presence in the city," he said, "so I saw this as an 'Up South' place, and something had to be done about it."

That something was an event that turned invisibility into a one-day work stoppage and a march to the Boston Common, converging on a memorial gathering for **Medgar Evers**. "And the presence was felt," said Jones, "and the message was sent."

In 1965, following repeated unsuccessful attempts to pass a racial imbalance law, **Rev. Vernon Carter** mustered a different kind of visibility: a vigil outside the Beacon Street offices of the Boston School Committee that began just a few days after the march from Roxbury to the State House led by **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.** and lasted almost four months—until the legislation was signed into law.

Rev. Carter's daughter, **Vernita Carter-Weller**, devoted most of her time as a panelist at the forum to reading from her father's account of how the vigil went



Kim Janey shows Gloria Lee and the forum audience her class picture from New School for Children in 1964.

Chris Lovett photo

from a crusade of one to something much larger. "But," she noted, "during those days, he was shot at, screamed at, assaulted, and reviled. At the same time, newspapers and news sources from not only Boston but from all across the country reported that thousands of people who came to walk with him, pray with him..."

Another panelist, **Charles Glenn**, was a desegregation planner who, according to **Ronald P. Formisano's** "Boston Against Busing," would later be a critic of plans put in place by Judge Garrity. Before he took charge of urban education and educational equity for the state in 1970, Glenn was a student activist at Harvard and then an Episcopal priest at a church in Roxbury. That led to contact with teenage civil rights activists in North Carolina, some of whom were invited to events with students in Boston.

For Roxbury teens with limited interest in events in the south, Glenn said, the meeting in late 1963 with the youthful activists from North Carolina was "absolutely galvanizing." A few months later, when urban and suburban teens gathered for a freedom school at St. Cyprian's Church in the South End, Glenn said he decided to have all the teaching done by teenagers. He also asked the students to write about what freedom meant to them.

"In my view," he said, "they weren't talking about what we call 'civil rights.' They weren't talking about laws—they weren't talking about that kind of thing. They were talking about the dignity of standing up as a human being and the way in which they saw that reflected in the great bravery of the youth they had heard from North Carolina, and which they intended to express in their own lives. And many of them did."

Another panelist, Batson's longtime assistant, **Lyda Peters**, had her own example of how an activist's life of service could inspire a movement. "And when you work with someone who has that kind of strength, they also spread that strength, and that's where action comes from," Peters recalled. "That's the kind of thing that makes people know that they have a mission in life and that the mission belongs to someone else: it's for you to do something for other people."

That was the mission cited by **Jean McGuire**, a panelist who formerly served as a Boston School Committee member and executive director of METCO. In September of 1974, when the desegregation order took effect, McGuire was with Batson, riding the first bus taking Black students to South Boston.

The event's moderator, former Boston mayor and city councilor **Kim Janey**, asked McGuire why she was on the bus. "We wanted to protect the children," McGuire answered. "We felt that if we as adults were there on the bus that would make the families who trusted us know that we put our lives on the line with their children, that it would be safe."

Almost fifty years after being visible on a bus, McGuire was calling for political visibility, repeatedly urging people to use their right to vote. Along with community control, visibility in educational

content was among the goals of freedom schools organized in Roxbury and Dorchester in 1966. Instead of learning materials in which Black presence was invisible or marginal, organizers of the schools wanted to include learning about non-violence, Black history, and civil responsibility.

One of their ventures, The New School for Children, was established when parents took their children out of the Gibson School in Dorchester, where a year-long substitute teacher, **Jonathan Kozol**, had been fired for teaching a poem by **Langston Hughes**. In his book "Death at an Early Age," Kozol said the firing had been triggered by a complaint from a single white parent.

Gloria Lee, a panelist who had worked for METCO, had taken part in a "Freedom Day Stay Out" in 1964. At the forum, she spotlighted her place in history by displaying a class photo from The New School for Children.

When Janey saw the photo, she asked for a closer look – and saw a piece of her own history near the upper right corner: a little girl, crowned with an upright, voluminous Afro. She then showed the photo to the audience – as a documentation, a discovery, and a trophy.

★★★★★★★★★★

Boston Desegregation and Busing Initiative will also be holding future forums on efforts to desegregate the schools. Dates will be announced in the BTU weekly bulletin.

To learn more about desegregation in the Boston Public Schools:

Check out this PBS documentary *The Busing Battleground*:

"On September 12, 1974, police were stationed outside schools across Boston as Black and white students were bused for the first time between neighborhoods to comply with a federal court desegregation order. The cross-town busing was met with shocking violence, much of it directed at children: angry white protesters threw rocks at school buses carrying Black children and hurled racial epithets at the students as they walked into their new schools. The chaos and racial unrest would escalate and continue for years. Using eyewitness accounts, oral histories and news footage that hasn't been seen in decades, The Busing Battleground pulls back the curtain on the volatile effort to end school segregation, detailing the decades-long struggle for educational equity that preceded the crisis. It illustrates how civil rights battles had to be fought across the North as well as the South and reckons with the class dimensions of the desegregation saga, exploring how the neighborhoods most impacted by the court's order were the poorest in the city..."

Read: *Common Ground*, a Pulitzer Prize winning report of Desegregation in BPS as seen through the lives of three families, by **J. Anthony Lukas**. At Amazon.

(This article was first published by the Dorchester Reporter. It is re-printed here with the permission of The Reporter and the author, Chris Lovett.)

We're Learning Here!

By Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.



(Amika Kemmler Ernst is a retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. Her "We're Learning Here" Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.)

Roger Clap Elementary School

Surrounded by two-family houses, the Roger Clap Elementary School is located in a northeast corner of Dorchester called the "Polish Triangle". Built in 1896, it is one of the oldest schools in the city and serves 130 students in grades K-6 this year.

On either side of the arched entrance to the school are raised beds of vegetables planted by students in Dean Martin's science classes. Potted plants, a display of student artwork and a colorful welcome banner overhead greet visitors in the front hallway. In the K2 classroom, Ulana Ainsworth is helping students become familiar with the lined lapboards that will be used for writing letters and words.

The Clap is a "single-strand" school and was in the first cohort of full-inclusion schools. Four years ago principal Emma Fialka-Feldman used Esser funds to help make sure that each classroom had the support of 2-3 educators. In the first grade classroom, for example, children are learning to tap out letters and put them together to make words, working in three small groups led by teacher Peyton Costa, paraprofessional Gabby Boyd, and learning specialist Farah Wong.

When fifth graders come into their classroom from specialists with a recurring

interpersonal issue, Jennifer Texeira checks in with her colleagues before directing everyone to join her on the rug for an "RJ" circle to process the conflict. Using a stuffed "wild thing" as a talking piece, each student has an opportunity to share their feelings and what they thought would "repair the harm" done.

Art teacher (and school historian) Connie Cummings introduces her third graders to "organic" and "inorganic" shapes before having them create collages inspired by Henri Matisse. When asked what others might learn from the Clap, she said community partnerships provide exceptional support and told me about a Parent Mentor Program offered by St. Stephen's Church, which trains and pays parents to work 1:1 or in small groups with students in several classrooms.

What resources are available in YOUR school's community?

Amika (ü)

Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed. D.
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Ms. Costa is helping us tap out letters to make words. In math we are learning about numbers and data. Yesterday we did a survey to decide which movie we want to watch and what kind of snack we want.
Grade 1 Students

We are looking at the patterns we made by pressing a pencil into foil to create a raised design and then coloring it with crayon. This is in Art class and we just started learning about photorealism, using light and shadow to make an object look realistic.
Angel Lugo & Lamar Francis, Grade 6

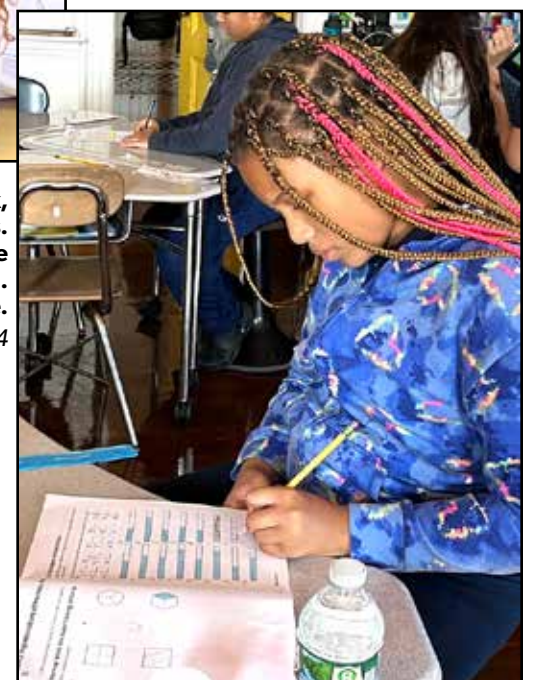


In this picture, Cornelius and I are putting sentences from a book we read in order. Ms. Lezama is helping us. We've learned to raise our hand if we need help and to look at the person who's talking without interrupting.
Jarianaliz Baez, Grade 3



I was working on a page in our math book, matching fractions with their pictures. We're learning to compare fractions using the symbols for "greater than" (>) and "less than" (<). We also use pictures to show the difference.
Ava Owens, Grade 4

We are practicing writing our names. This year we are learning how to read and write and count!
Adriel Soto Arias & Ethan Hiciano, K2



We were having an RJ [Restorative Justice] Circle. We've learned that personal space is really important to some people and that a talking piece helps people feel calm. In ELA we're reading Esperanza Rising and learning about the challenges faced by immigrants.
Grade 5 Students



We are Turn & Talk partners talking about what the word JUDGE means, like in "Don't judge a book by its cover." We are learning sight words and words with closed syllables that have two consonants and one vowel in the middle. We also learned that a digraph has two letters — like TH — that make one sound when put together.
Ayson Jeremiah & Issac Torres, Grade 2

