Teachers and students testify about the harmful affects of over-testing

By Jessica Tang

During the May 26th School Committee meeting, ten teachers were joined by four students and testified about the impacts and concerns of over-testing students. Almost 30 other supporters were there, vowing to fight for their students.

The teachers and students shared stories, ranging from concerns about the amount of testing to the harm it was doing to students. They described the impact on students and teachers, including pedagogical, social-emotional well-being, and raised awareness of the harmful effects of over-assessing students.

The teachers and students are a part of an ad-hoc organizing committee convened in response to the rising concerns about the role of assessments in schools. Teachers agreed that assessments are important and play an important role in lesson planning, but are concerned that there are too many standardized tests imposed by federal, state, and district policies. Depending on the answer, the score may be that it is advisable to obtain dual licensure. In any case, it is well beyond the scope of this short memo to explain the ins and outs of this. Please contact either Michael or Curt at the BTU office. If there are any permanent teachers who were involuntarily reassigned as a result of inclusion, please contact either Michael or Curt immediately. (Also, the same holds for permanent teachers who may have been reassigned as a result of a question of whether the BTU or the local union and its employer. We have no quarrel with the mandate per se, just the cost. Why should employees, once employed, have to pay to prove their innocence?) The BTU has filed legislation to shift the burden of payment to the employer. In the meantime, negotiations over the cost between the BTU and the AFT are ongoing.

Open Postings: The open posting language in the contract, when it was agreed upon 20 or so years ago, was designed to allow schools to be able to circumvent the transfer process to hire what we called then an “exotic” position, e.g., a teacher who had to teach two biology and three physics classes, and so on. There, too, was a provision for a school to place a stipend on the position calling for extra time or extra responsibilities, and thereby exempting it from the normal transfer route. These were designed as exceptions, however. Now the department has authorized what was a 100 transfer positions and mandated that all be transformed into “open postings.” This clearly is an attempt to circumvent the transfer process. We are challenging this change in process and have taken the matter to arbitration. We will keep you informed.

Finally, let me give you an update on the takeover at the Dever and the Holland.

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Running down a “Class Act”

Hello Channel 7,

I would like to ask that you do a Class Act story on the Urban Science Academy’s (USA) DreamFar High School Marathon team. I am simply amazed that we have students and staff so committed to achieving the goal of running a marathon, they give up after school time and Saturday mornings to train for running a marathon. It is inspiring to our school community and fills both participants and staff with confidence, determination, teamwork, goal setting, endurance and pride. I am so proud of the staff and students for doing this.

USA has been involved with DreamFar for 3 seasons now. This group has already turned 5 students and 2 teachers into marathoners. This year they have 5 (2 freshmen, 1 sophomore, 1 senior) students participating and 5 teachers. One student will be completing his 3rd marathon this year while another student will be completing their 2nd. For 2 of the teachers, this will be their first marathon. This group practice 3 times per week after school (Oct-May) and run with the larger organization for our Saturday morning long runs (December-May). USA’s DreamFar team practice on the Boston Marathon course to get ready for the Providence Marathon in early May. By the end of each season they will have completed 4 road races and logged in over a hundred miles on the road.

The teacher who leads this group is Darcel Hunt, she has recruited staff, Julie Wright, Shannon Kearney-MacCormack, Julie Conners and Yanna Minchenko. The students are Julio Perez, Med Bukenya, Kiwon Moseley, Ricardo Cabrera, Nola de la Cruz.

Sincerely,
Allison Doherty

Urban Science Academy [USA]
@ West Roxbury Education Complex
1205 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132

Get your new BTU hat here at the new BTU on-line store

The BTU is excited to announce the launch of the BTU online store! A new BTU hat seemed to be a natural first product as it would help to promote BTU pride, be easy to store, and could not be damaged during shipping. The design for the hat was adapted from the BTU T-shirts that were worn last year during contract negotiations. The hats are Union-made in the USA, and embroidered by the last remaining Union shop in America. The idea was presented to the Executive Board for approval, and then presented to the membership.

The Harbor Middle and High School had a prevocational program that teaches vocational skills to students with disabilities, along with their peer buddies from the Best Buddies program. Teaming the shipping and handling of the products from the BTU store with this program seemed to be a natural fit — an opportunity for the Union to support the inclusion program at the Harbor, while the students at the Harbor learned valuable skills.

Harbor teacher Rachel Zielezowski and occupational therapist Wynne Freed have adapted each phase of the shipping and handling process to match the skills of every student so they all can participate, regardless of the severity of their disability. Members of the team contribute what they can, while learning to improve skills they already have.

The students construct the shipping boxes, pack the hats, seal them, calculate and affix the postage, then seal them to be taken to the post office for mailing. The hats are sold at cost, not for profit, with shipping included in the purchase price. A two-dollar shipping and handling fee is charged for each hat ordered. This fee will go directly to support the Harbor School program. This money will allow them to access functional life skills programming, such as food prep and community travel training. The business model provided by this hat sale will provide opportunities for learning organization, money management, and time management/efficiency.

Show your BTU pride and support the Harbor program! To order your hat, go to: http://btu.org/btu-store

(Submitted by Occupational Therapist and Executive Board member Laura Lee Johnson.)
What is the BPS sick leave policy?

The BPS sick leave benefit is for absences caused by illness or injury and when an employee is absent due to a pregnancy, health condition, or leave, and the like. The following process is in effect: in contacting the school or BPS subcommittee to discuss the issue of one’s absence. The BPS monitors sick leave in order to detect what it perceives as “pat- terns” of frequent or excessive leave as abuse. If this occurs, the treatment acts as a disciplinary matter. If a pattern has been established through due process following the guidance in Superintendent’s Circular on Employee Discipline Procedures [BPS-PP-10], then teachers can be required to furnishing a doctor’s note for each and every absence. Docking pay is a form of discipline and if the BPS discipline process isn’t followed, the teacher should ignore it immediately.

The “Employee Sick Leave Policy” can be found in Superintendent’s Circular BRS-PP-12. It details that all absences for 6 or more days are considered absences incurred by weekends and/or holidays are considered consecutive days [absences interrupted by weekends or holidays are considered more consecutive days]. The physician’s letter must be on file for personnel files to have proof of printout if needed in the future.

Do “permanent” BPS teachers have tenure or professional teaching status & what’s the difference – particularly with respect to dismissal?

So-called “permanent” BPS teachers actually have what General Law C. 71, s. 41 refers to as ‘professional teacher status’ or PTS – not tenure. This legislative take reads: “For the purposes of this section, a teacher, school librarian, school adjustment counselor, teacher, school social worker or school psychologist who has served in the public schools of a school district for the three previous consecutive school years shall be considered a teacher, and shall be entitled to professional teacher status as provided in section forty-two. The superintendent of said district, upon the recommendation of the principal, may award such status to any teacher who has served in the district for at least four years. Failure to submit the required letter(s) in a timely basis can result in discipline.”

Updates on a few topics... continued from page 1

Phone Numbers

- At the Wellness Project: 617-288-0950
- AFT Massachusetts: 617-425-3542
- Function Office: 617-288-3312
- Lounge Office: 617-288-3312
- Vision Center: 617-288-5940
- Tremont Credit Union... 781-813-5626

Know Your Rights

by Caren Carew

Caren Carew

The next Teachers are Awesome event is in order to detect what it perceives as ‘pat- terns’ of frequent or excessive leave as abuse. If this occurs, the treatment acts as a disciplinary matter. If a pattern has been established through due process following the guidance in Superintendent’s Circular on Employee Discipline Procedures [BPS-PP-10], then teachers can be required to furnishing a doctor’s note for each and every absence. Docking pay is a form of discipline and if the BPS discipline process isn’t followed, the teacher should ignore it immediately.

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Public school teachers in the state of Mas- sachusetts no longer have tenure. We lost that right in the Massachusetts Ed Reform Act of 1991. It was at that time, our professional sta- tus and threshold for dismissal from same was reduced to what was described in the preced- ing paragraphs. Pre-education Reform Act, General Law C. 71, s. 42 provided that “no teacher shall be dismissed unless by a two- thirds vote of the whole school committee. A tenured teacher shall not be dismissed except for inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbec- onging a teacher, insubordination or failure on the part of the teacher to satisfy teacher performance standards developed pursuant to section thirty-eight of this chapter or other just cause.” A teacher without professional teacher sta- tus may seek review of a dismissal decision within thirty days after receiving notice of his dismissal by filing a grievance for arbitration with the commissioner…”

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In our opinion, the information is fairly stated in all material respects.

The information has been subjected to underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the financial statements. The information has been subjected to our audits. We conducted our audits in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

**SCHEDULE I**

**PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Furniture, Fixtures &amp; Equipment</strong></td>
<td>$504,932</td>
<td>$495,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landscaping Improvements</strong></td>
<td>226,225</td>
<td>226,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less - Accumulated Depreciation and Amortization</strong></td>
<td>77,667</td>
<td>77,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT</strong></td>
<td>$1,787,876</td>
<td>$1,787,147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCHEDULE II**

**Statement of Expenses (continued)**

**Contributions**

Contributions received are recorded as unrestricted, temporarily restricted, or permanently restricted based on the guidance and policies established by the organization. For the years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012, the Union did not accrue any contributions. The differences between the reported amounts that would result in temporarily or permanently restricted net assets.

**Property and Equipment and Depreciation**

The preparation of financial statements in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities and disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues and expenses during the reporting period. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

**2. Investments**

The Union held its investments in a variety of debt and equity securities in accordance with its investment policy and the requirements of its contracts. The Union’s investments as of August 31, 2013 and 2012 were $2,752,625 and $2,804,643, respectively. The following schedule summarizes the investment activity for the years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dividend Income</strong></td>
<td>$6,452,090</td>
<td>$6,664,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realized Long-Term Gains</strong></td>
<td>74,232</td>
<td>74,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realized Short-Term Gains</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
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<td><strong>Unrealized Gain (Loss)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Net Increase in Long-Term Investments</strong></td>
<td>$6,526,322</td>
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**STATEMENTS OF EXPENSES (continued)**

**1. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies**

The financial statements of the Boston Teachers Union have been presented on the accrual method of accounting.

The Union’s Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, for the years ending August 31, 2011, 2012 and 2013 are subject to examination by the IRS, generally for three years after they were filed. The schedule of expenses on pages 11 and 12 are presented for purposes of additional analysis within a context of part of the financial statements. Such information is the responsibility of management and has been derived from and relies on the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the financial statements. The auditors are not responsible for conducting the auditing procedures applied in the audit of the financial statements and cannot comment on the fairness of the underlying accounting principles used.

The Union is required to present information regarding financial position and activities in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The Union is required to present a statement of activities for the year.

The Union held $2,750,625 and $2,804,643 at August 31, 2013

The Union, in its capacity as a labor union, is a nonprofit organization that is exempt from both federal and state income taxes under Section 501(c) (5) of the Internal Revenue Codes. The Union’s Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, for the years ending August 31, 2011, 2012 and 2013 are subject to examination by the IRS, generally for three years after they were filed.

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The Union invests in various investment securities. Investment securities are exposed to various risks such as interest rates, market, and credit risks. Due to the nature of investment securities, it is at least reasonably possible that changes in the values of investment securities will occur, and changes in market values may materially affect the amounts reported in the statement of financial position.

5. Transactions with Related Entities

The Union has one building representative at a related entity. BTU/H.W.U., Building Corp. on a tenant-at-will basis under the terms of a lease which ended September 1, 2005. The rental expense is adjusted annually on September 1, to correspond to the change in the "Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers for Boston, MA, All Items," during the twelve-month period which ended in the previous B.T.U.H.W.U. Building Corp. is responsible for all utilities, including water, sewer and waste removal. In addition, BTU/H.W.U., Building Corp. agreed to maintain Building Corp. totaled $105,560 and $104,673, respectively, for the years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012.

In addition, the Boston Teachers Union pays $15 per day for conference room use from BTU/H.W.U., Building Corp under an agreement which was renewed June 30, 2007. As of January 31, 2004, the agreement has not been modified and continues under the initial terms. Fees paid under this agreement for the fiscal years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012 totaled $0 and $460, respectively.

6. Retired Teachers' Benefits

Effective July 31, 1987, dues paid to the Union by retired teachers and retired teachers’ beneficiaries are both chargeable and non-chargeable. Dues paid under this agreement for the fiscal years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012, respectively, were allocated between chargeable and non-chargeable based on the number of Union members in each building group they represent. One building representative is allowed for every 25 Union members or portion thereof. These stipends have been considered to be 100% chargeable as they are paid based on a per capitation formula.

7. Retirement Plan Contribution

The employees of the Union participate in a defined contribution retirement plan. The Union’s contributions are equal to 10% of the annual salary of participating employees plus administration fees. The Union’s contributions, up to the plan’s total $128,811 and $127,939, respectively, for the years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012, respectively.

8. Advertising

Advertising costs charged to expense when incurred. Advertising expenses for the fiscal years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012 were $7,182 and $6,536, respectively.

9. Per Capita - Working Massachusetts

On September 29, 2005, the Union voted to join Working Massachusetts, a Massachusetts labor organization which performs public relations, research, and communications work on behalf of the working poor. The Union contributes $5,000 per year to support the organization.

Per capita for membership is paid and billed quarterly. For the fiscal years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012, per capita payments were $2,900 and $2,500, respectively.

10. AFT Innovation Fund

Boston Educational Development Foundation, Inc.

Boston Teachers Union received AFT Innovation Fund grants in fiscal years ended August 31, 2013 and 2012. The grants were anticipated to “increase students’ engagement in learning by creating prototypes of high-quality instructional units that can be distributed online.” The Union turned these grants over to Boston Educational Development Foundation, Inc., a tax-exempt organization that “acts as a fiscal agent and employer for the Public School system.”

11. Evaluation of Subsequent Events

The Union has evaluated subsequent events through March 17, 2014, the date which the financial statements were available to be issued.
Dear Editor,

My name is Lauralee Johnson and I am an educational Title I teacher at the College Preparatory School, Everett, and Taylor Schools, and have been working in the BPS for 20 years. I have worked with children with autism, severe multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, children with learning disabilities in regular education, children with severe social and emotional disorders, and children with virtually any disability you can name. The children I work with are all on an individualized education plan and, therefore, they have an ability that interferes with their educational progress and require specialized services – and is a legal document. A team of special education professionals and parents has determined my services are necessary for these students to make academic progress. Generally I see these students weekly or bi-weekly.

I now spend all day telling my students I believe in them and that the best way to help improve our students’ learning? As a teacher, I have a responsibility to help students understand that they can do better for our students!

Bernie Lormilus

I come before you as a graduate of the Boston Public Schools. Curriculum experts… those in the classroom. Those educators… those in the classroom. Those teachers and students testify at Boston School Committee meetings and we have decided to put a cap on how much of their limited resources they will use on this assessment.

I spent all year telling my students I believe in them and that the best way to help improve our students’ learning? As a teacher, I have a responsibility to help students understand that they can do better for our students!

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A Commentary by Michael J. Maguire

I don’t think that the smallest, most fuel-efficient car I get can find. Recently I traveled and had need of a vehicle. At the car-rental counter I was asked if I’d like to upgrade to a better car for just a few dollars a day more. I declined. Other such luxury solicitations are endured. Better to be frugal.

When retrieving my vehicle from the garage, I walked past the “Gold” section reserved for preferred customers. It was conveniently located up front. Those who had paid more had their cars brought to them. I, however, trekked into a labyrinth searching for my car.

Days later when I returned the car, I again experienced the difference between regular and Gold service. One return aisle was wide and open and located near the elevators, and the other had eight sedans queuing up. I was now ninth in the queue.

I have been traveling with my wife and children, I’d gladly paid the extra money for the expedited services. Life is full of sacrifices and I was happy with mine on this trip.

Then came the airport.

At the digital kiosk where I printed my boarding pass the unassisted and aged crowd was already present. Can you wade through Alice Duer Miller’s “The Smallest, Most Fuel-Efficient Car I Can Get”? When retrieving my vehicle from the garage, I again experienced the difference between regular and Gold service.

Weeks of instructional time. Create a system that we now rely on tell me little that I didn’t learn long ago the importance of education.

The MCAS test in Biology is usually in the 1st week of June. Because I am tied to the state’s schedule immediately I lose three weeks of geniune learning time. Create a system where everything is about the test and students quickly learn to shut down after the test is given.

Before the test is given I have to negotiate through the other sophomore tests. Math and English. Math and English. Five days of instruction. My classes are shut down, and forget any classes that do take place after the test since the students are exhausted and stressed from a month’s worth of nothing.

The district science department, whom I have tremendous respect for, suggests tennays of preparation for the test which includes some review, but a lot of test taking strategy. With so much on the line this gaming of the test becomes crucial. Even if we know as educators it provides little in the way of educational benefit.

The district has its tests as well which include pretests for each of four units, midterms, and finals. And then there are the WIDA tests, for which many of my English language learners may perform badly.

And occasionally I’d like to give my own asessment to see what they are learning from my instruction.

And it’s not just classroom time that is consumed by testing. When I entered the profession 25 years ago, the conversations we were having were centered on how we turn our students on to learning. Today... almost every department meeting is concerned with improving test scores by figuring out how to get our students to understand how to improve their open response scores. Like I said before...

We should not treat any of its citizens differently. But the US government continues to do that. How do you think a teen from the projects who would want to save time by joining the ranks of the college bound and would welcome the chance to avoid the cattle call of mass SQA screenings. And while I am sympathetic, I am dismayed that the government so blatantly treats its citizens differently.

Private businesses can do what they like. If a private business can get more money for something of its own a little more money, they will score lowest. And finally, computerized tests don’t put into words. Computerized tests don’t inspire ideas out, not classes controlled by a few criterion.

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The MCAS test in Biology is usually in the 1st week of June. Because I am tied to the state’s schedule immediately I lose three weeks of geniune learning time. Create a system where everything is about the test and students quickly learn to shut down after the test is given.

Before the test is given I have to negotiate through the other sophomore tests. Math and English. Math and English. Five days of instruction. My classes are shut down, and forget any classes that do take place after the test since the students are exhausted and stressed from a month’s worth of nothing.

The district science department, whom I have tremendous respect for, suggests tennays of preparation for the test which includes some review, but a lot of test taking strategy. With so much on the line this gaming of the test becomes crucial. Even if we know as educators it provides little in the way of educational benefit.

The district has its tests as well which include pretests for each of four units, midterms, and finals. And then there are the WIDA tests, for which many of my English language learners may perform badly.

And occasionally I’d like to give my own asessment to see what they are learning from my instruction.

And it’s not just classroom time that is consumed by testing. When I entered the profession 25 years ago, the conversations we were having were centered on how we turn our students on to learning. Today... almost every department meeting is concerned with improving test scores by figuring out how to get our students to understand how to improve their open response scores. Like I said before...
The Community Academy of Science and Health (CASH) is located near Fields Corner in Dorchester. It is the one surviving “small school” from the former Hyde Park High School Complex, and moved into the former Grover Cleveland building three years ago.

I was invited to visit CASH by High School History Coach Michelle Morrissey, and warmly welcomed by the headmaster and her staff. The school’s hallways encourage a focus on achievement: outside the main office is a “Wall of Dreams” displaying individual students’ career goals; further on, I noted exemplary student work posted under the title “Are your notes THIS good?”

Having just finished discussing the circumstances that give rise to slums, students in one class were watching the film “Slumdog Millionaire.” In another they were studying constitutional amendments, having chosen the two they thought most important. Student teacher Shauntel Garner-Anderson was leading them in a lively conversation about what happened in Trayvon Martin’s case. Andrea Doremus-Cuetara was helping her class of English Language Learners understand the vocabulary and protocol of debating.

In a crowded music class, under the direction of teacher Ian Glaude, students were practicing on keyboards, trumpets and trombones. A variety of science and math classes were also in session. Autumn Tobin had her Environmental Science class tossing coins to investigate population growth, while Taiwo Stephenson’s chemistry students were taking notes on chemical reactions and biology teacher Kelly Best’s tenth graders were labeling a drawing of the human heart.

Throughout this still small high school I saw lots of evidence to support Junior Rashea Ivey-Lewis’s earnest comment: “I really like how our teachers interact with us, sitting down and explaining things step by step.”

We were doing an experiment on population growth in our AP Environmental Science Class with Ms. Tobin. We’ve learned that human beings are selfish, polluting the earth for profit. We’ve learned that mining coal depletes soil nutrients and produces acid rain; we’ve also learned that reusing plastic bottles can harm our endocrine system.

I was in Algebra II and I was working with our student teacher, Mr. Wladis. He was showing me how to find the end behavior of any graph (how it will look) from just the equation. I really like how our teachers interact with us, sitting down and explaining things step by step.

We are using the Internet to find information we will share with the class at our morning meeting. We are learning social skills, how to speak in public, and much more. We also do work study projects at local businesses.

This is in geometry class. Ms. James was helping us understand how to find more than one solution to an absolute value equation. This year we have learned how to graph linear equations.

I was talking with my chemistry teacher, Mr. Stephenson. He was explaining the rules for balancing equations. We’re working on chemical reactions, and I’ve learned how to separate the bond between hydrogen and oxygen in water.

I’m asking Ms. Best about how the heart works. I think cells are interesting. I’ve learned that they can be either simple or really, really complex. Eukaryotic cells, like we have in our bodies, are the most complex.