Imagine this: A math teacher gets hauled into the principal’s office at the end of the first term and is asked to explain the ins and outs of his grading system. It seems that of his 150 students, the white students 6% receive a failing grade while 30% of the black students fail. By gender a similar pattern emerges: 4% of his female students fail and 12% of his male students fail. Many of the students on the receiving end of this disparate treatment complain, and the teachers vows to examine his practice. Next term, the same pattern remains. And so on. Two years later, the teacher has shown no understanding of the issue, no willingness to justify or even discuss it, and no attempt to change his practice. Now extend this behavior to all teachers in the school. The principal, of course, would not look the other way.

Now consider the analogous results of the teacher performance evaluation process. The most current data, as of 11/1/13, reveals that a black teacher is more than five times as likely as a teacher between 30 and 60 is twice as likely to receive an unsatisfactory. And a teacher older than 60 is 12 times as likely as a teacher between 30 and 60 to receive an unsatisfactory. The disturbing patterns in the evaluation process first became public last spring. It was later revealed that the pattern had first become known the previous year. The department promised it would look at the problem and take some action steps. Here’s what the department said in late May 2013:

“We (the school district) recognize that factors such as age, race, and gender may improperly affect the evaluation that a teacher receives, and we are taking steps to eliminate these biases.

1. Reviewing all cases to ensure that these trends do not unfairly impact career decisions
2. Raising racial, gender, and age consciousness of evaluators
3. Using additional evaluators to validate evaluations.”

We are still waiting for a report on the steps that have been taken. When these patterns first became known the district said that the data were incomplete, that the report had come in mid-evaluation cycle and that we shouldn’t jump to any conclusions. Now the data is complete and the patterns of discrimination are persistent and no less alarming.

In late November, the BTU E-Bulletin ran two, albeit unscientific, polls asking readers’ opinions on two issues: 1) Is there bias in the evaluation process; and 2) regardless of your answer to the first question, does the department owe us an explanation as to the disparate outcome in the process? The results are clear. 66% of respondents believe the current performance system to be unfair and biased. And 84% feel, simply, that the department owes us an explanation as to the disparities in what is advertised as an objective process.

A few takeaways here: The polls drew large numbers – far larger than in past polls – of respondents. And most respondents are not bearing the brunt of the results (i.e., they’re not getting bad evaluations), and are therefore in a truly objective place to view the process. We all have a problem in this. On the one hand, the process is biased and discriminatory, and our members are suffering. On the other hand, the department is suffering from a credibility problem whether it admits it or not. Given all the internal discussion over this and given the sensitivity of the issues involved – not to mention the unfairness to our members – the department ought to act sooner rather than later.

The union has taken legal action in this matter.
Playing the political field

The recent mayoral election tells us that we need to find allies wherever we can. The big media outlets bought into the positive spin that an army of moms were fighting against the teachers for better schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our opponents knew the spin was faked and it was nearly effective. We need to conduct better outreach to parents both as individuals and in organizations. We all have to become involved in doing this. We can not do it alone. Brenda Chaney and Jessica Tang can help lead us but we all must be willing to participate.

We also should seek new allies. Sadly, the Democrats have turned on us. From Barack Obama and Arne Duncan, to Deval Patrick and our local representatives, seemingly all our natural allies have sold us out to corporate education reformers. Perhaps our former allies truly believe the message of ed reform or perhaps they are taking kickbacks, but one thing is certain: we are getting used.

So let us turn elsewhere. I suggest we give the Republicans a try. No, I don’t mean stop reading, hear me out. The latest spin on labor unions by our detractors seems to be “unions once served a noble purpose, but they are no longer needed today.” By couching their argument in this way, our opponents seek to sway those who are presently neutral on the topic. Their strategy is to get people to think that unions have outlived their usefulness. That way, good people need not feel badly about being anti-union since it’s the unions that are out-of-touch.

It’s a good tactic. Our counter attack needs to be two-fold: a) we need to dway the public from such sophistry, and b) we need to confront the national Republican base that unions are not their foes.

I propose that we send members of the BTU to local, state, and national Republican conventions. I’m not suggesting that we “infiltrate” the GOP, rather I suggest that we send our members who are already registered Republicans to the GOP gatherings the very same way we send BTU members who are registered Democrats to Democrat gatherings. This way we can build allies in both camps.

In terms of education, our message ought to be that charter schools are no economic bargain for the taxpayers. Laying aside the gross inequity of services, we focus on the money. What fiscal conservative could possibly welcome the money drain that are charter schools? Attack the money, and hope of charter schools diminishes automatically.

Wal-Mart is another example. Call attention to the sky high cost of providing food stamps to the employees of our nation largest employer, and watch support for Thanksgiv- ing Day shopping dry up faster than the left-overs.

The Republican bigwigs will not rally to our side outright, but they are not our audi- ence. Our audience is the hardworking small business owners who see the Democrats and unions as pickpockets targeting their profits. By pointing out that Republican policies are in fact hurting their bottom line, the rank and file may start to question their leadership on our key issues.

Once we have a foothold in the GOP, we will then move more openly with the Republican leadership. In statewide elections the GOP does well considering how few in number they are in comparison to Democrats and so-called independent voters. Our support could help them, they might be thankful for that assistance.

It may seem heretical for a labor union to court Republicans but let us consider our last four governors. In 2010 Governor Patrick signed into law the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap. This version of ed reform has been more detrimental to public education that anything the previous three Republican governors had crafted. Why then would we want second helpings from the Democrats?

In the long run, we want to be taken for granted. Lately, both locally and nation- ally, the Democrats are stepping on us and yet we still support them. The Democrats aren’t going to change unless we give them a rea- son. I propose we give them that reason in the upcoming gubernatorial contest.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy and is co-editor of the Boston Union Teacher.)

A Mission and Vision for Professional Learning

By Paul J. Tittert, BTU Director of Professional Training

The first months of this school year I have had the great pleasure of talking to educa- tions across BPS about their interest with professional learning. I have been fascinated by the range of learning opportunities provided for and created by the BTU. Of course these opportunities vary in quality and impact, but each and every educator has had at least one powerful learning experience that has made a lasting impact on their career and practice.

As I hear from more people about their learning experiences, I am increasingly excited to work to build this Professional Learning Initiative into something that will help our members have more rewarding careers.

In order to do this, it is important that we develop a shared understanding of what makes successful professional learning and try to create experiences that meet that understanding. In planning workshops in September and October we began to craft a mission and vision for the PLI that reflects this understanding. Responses to the BTU Professional Development Survey, (http://bit.ly/ BTUPDSurvey) and the many conversa- tions I mentioned above have also played a critical role in shaping this mission.

What follows is a first draft of a proposed BTU Resolution on Professional Learning. Because it is so important that the beliefs espoused in this document reflect the beliefs and experiences of our members, I am asking you to read it and let me know what you think. What parts make sense to you? What do you disagree with? What is missing from this document? What does it need?

The best way to share your thoughts is to join a public conversation within an online version of the Professional Learning Initiative. Go to http://bit.ly/BTUPLPMission, a Google Docs version of the mission is open for public comment. Instructions for how to do so are available on the site. Of course, you can also send your comments directly to me at ptittert@btu.org.

An extended public comment period, a revised version of this resolution will be up for a vote at a full membership meeting.

Building on the principles of adult education, the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) sets forth the following as standards for professional learning in the Boston Public Schools. The BTU considers professional learning to be:

- Led by Educators Themselves - Where ever possible, professional learning should be facilitated by the professionals who do the work every day, valuing the knowledge and potential contributions of education researchers and outside experts. When qualified practitioners are not able to facilitate, build upon the unique knowledge and skill of the individual educator, balancing the need to learn specific tools and strategies with the complementary need for reflection and theo retic understanding.
- Inquir y Driven - Priorities for professional learning must be identified at the classroom level, arising from the span of a short workshop or lecture, so professional learning should be designed to allow educators the opportu nity to experiment with new practices, incor porate research, and make adjustments to practice over time.
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Boston Teachers Union

Professional Learning Initiative

Mission and Vision for Professional Learning

The Boston Teachers Union believes that successful professional learning that pro motes and improves student-learning and well-being requires that educators be recog nized both as professionals and as learners.

Professional learning is defined as continuous professional learning in all of its many forms, including but not limited to, the following:

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Know Your Rights
by Caren Carew

When posed this question from a colleague, I made an inquiry to the lawyers at the AFT-MAF and they furnished me with the following information. In general, a public employee may not accept any gift worth $50 or more that is given because of the position he or she holds. Public employees may accept gifts that are worth less than $50, but they have to disclose in writing that they have done so; if based on the specific circumstances, a reasonable person would think that the public employee might unduly show favor to the giver or the giver’s child, or be influenced by the giver.

The law prohibits gifts to public employe,es. If a parent, for example, gives a gift to a public school, or a particular classroom, and the $50 limit does not apply. Your school district may have its own additional rules about gifts, which you should follow. Example: A Parent-Teacher Organization wants to give $75 gift cards to teachers to buy classroom supplies. The teachers may accept the gift cards but must use them to buy classroom supplies, and should keep receipts to show that they did so. Supplies bought with the gift cards are the property of the school, not the teachers.

The Ethics Commission recently created an exempted list of class gifts to teachers. A teacher may accept a gift, or several gifts during the school year, from public school students and their parents, with an aggregated value of up to $150, if the gift is identified only as being from the class, and the gifter does not know that individual amounts given are not identified to the recipient. Gifts received pursuant to this exemption are not required to be disclosed. The list is not exhaustive; a reasonable person would not conclude that the gift would influence the teacher’s conduct with regard to any individual or would cause the teacher to favor any individual. Example: A teacher has a class with 23 students. Parents of 20 of the students collect money and give a teacher a $150 gift certificate to a book store, indicating that it is a class gift. A teacher may accept the gift, knowing that the gift was given by individuals who did not participate in the class gift.

Each School-Site Council determines its own policies concerning school-related gifts. Each is required to adopt guidelines that follow the above-discussed principles.

How are bylaws/operational procedures for SCSs determined?

Each School-Site Council determines its own procedures for operational and procedural issues. The bylaws of the school district, with which the individual school must comply, may contain provisions that are not required to be disclosed. The law prohibits gifts to public employe,
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Why Aren’t Our Schools Interested In Developing Well Rundowed Individuals?

What is legally acceptable as gifts to public school teachers and staff?

When posed this question from a colleague, I made an inquiry to the lawyers at the AFT-MAF and they furnished me with the following information. In general, a public employee may not accept any gift worth $50 or more that is given because of the position he or she holds. Public employees may accept gifts that are worth less than $50, but they have to disclose in writing that they have done so; if based on the specific circumstances, a reasonable person would think that the public employee might unduly show favor to the giver or the giver’s child, or be influenced by the giver.

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Fifteen BTU members were selected in August to participate in a new Teacher Leader program that supports educators to better understand and influence education policy. In the first session, leaders had the opportunity to speak with BTU president Richard Stutman about the challenges and goals of our union. Last month, fellows met with Secretary of Education Matt Malone and had the opportunity to ask him questions and hear from him about policy decisions made at the state and national levels. In January, fellows will be joining other fellows from around the country to speak with and hear from AFT president Randi Weingarten.

The 15 Teacher Leader Fellows are:
Robert Baroz, Dearborn
Gary Bechtold, Otis Elementary
Edvorette Brewster, Lila G. Frederick
Kristy Ferreira Dupuis, Boston Latin School
Riana Good, Boston Latin Academy
Natasha Huggins, New Mission High School
Darcel Hunt, Urban Science Academy
Chima Ikonne, Mary Lyon
Afra Khan, Holland Elementary
Theresa Lee, Sumner Elementary
Bernadine Lormilus, JFK
Suzie McGlone, Orchard Gardens
Nathan Proulx, Orchard Gardens
Sarah Sawyers, Ohrenberger
Cassandra Wallace, Boston Arts Academy
I took the Orange Line downtown on a crisp fall day to visit Snowden International High School. Classes are held in two buildings near Copley Square, the main one being an impressive brownstone on Newbury Street built in the mid-19th century. Inside, an elegant staircase leads from the main entrance to the second floor.

Assistant Director Vicky Magaletta escorted me through a maze of classrooms in this former mansion, some with huge windows overlooking Dartmouth Street, others with no windows at all. Students were reading textbooks or novels, solving algebraic equations, and using laptops to research topics of personal interest. On the door to Jaclyn Smee’s class was a poster-sized graphic that caught my interest by highlighting a variety of ways that mathematics is used: from reports on how many Americans have allergies (50 million!) to evidence that people have been blowing kisses since 3000 B.C.

We then walked to the former YWCA, where several other classes are held in the basement. It was fun watching ELA teacher Seth Peterson’s 11th grade World Literature students, who were planning and enacting scenes from The Alchemist, by Paulo Coelho. History teacher Karen McCarthy had painted her room in the most wonderful colors and filled a wall with masks from around the world. Lin Liu was reviewing vocabulary by having students name each Chinese character she held up on a card. She escorts a group of her students to China every year and one wall was filled with photos from their most recent trip.

Although it has always taught several world languages (currently Japanese, Mandarin, French and Spanish), Snowden has recently added an International Baccalaureate Program. Headmaster Cara Livermore explained that this academically challenging program gives Snowden its focus and inspiration, with all students encouraged to take at least one IB class. In addition, every year a teacher volunteers to organize a service-learning project in a different country during April vacation week – this year a group of students will travel to Costa Rica!

I hope the daily journeys with your students are joyful and satisfying, and the challenges more invigorating than exhausting. HAPPY HOLIDAYS! Please invite me to visit YOUR school!
School improvement grants results show some promise

Preliminary data from the first two years of the Obama administration’s School Improvement Grants program, which put extra federal dollars into schools that have tried different interventions—into low-performing schools, suggest mixed results.

The data show that more than two-thirds of the schools that first received funding in 2010-2011 made gains in reading and math after two years in the program. That holds true across different turnaround models that schools adopted as well as across school size levels and locations. In addition, schools that were in the program for two years showed better results overall than those that were in the program for just one year.

Districts and the SIG schools did receive additional resources, the increased test scores are due to the hard work of educators and students, as well as the opportunity to try multiple interventions and innovations. For example, the U.S. Department of Education’s news release on the SIG results highlights Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore, where the AFT represents educators. In a school where nearly 90 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the dropout rate was cut in half, and proficiency in English language arts rose from 41 percent to 53 percent in the first year of the grant, the release notes. And it outlines some of the school’s innovations: a night school where students can get tutoring or take credit-recovery classes, a recording and media production studio where career and technical students can train, and the chance to take dual enrollment classes at nearby Baltimore City Community College.

The SIG program likely will be overlapped when Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Republicans have tried to eliminate the funding, while proponents support continuing it with added flexibility in what designs schools can use to improve student performance. The AFT has consistently argued that the turnaround models required under SIG are too narrow, and often preclude effective reforms, and we have pushed for expanding the models and intervention strategies available to schools under ESEA.

[ bitch Antunez, Jane Memmery, Education Week, Dan Gurshy]

Retiree activism is a major resource for the union

Retiree activism is one of the labor movement’s greatest resources, AFT chief of staff and AAFT president Mark Richard told the opening session Nov. 20 in Washington, D.C.

Richard urged conference participants to seize the moment—to use their “union move its agenda—and to somehow pass that passion on to younger members. One way of doing that, he said, is involve members, Richard suggested, is through technology.” We have to find a way to use our passion and skill set in a way that resonates with a technology-driven society!”

Wellyn Collins, a member of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers retiree chapter, agreed. When it comes to technology, “our younger members told us we needed to change, and once we accepted that and began to use technology, it made us aware of the power of the technology worked for us.”

“We incorporate all of the things we’ve done in the past—organizing, lobbying, making phone calls,” added Jim Carr, a retiree member of the New York State Public Employees Federation. “We hold rallies, we use Facebook, we write letters to the editor. We have to embrace what works.”

Embracing technology often requires an “attitude adjustment,” said Roger Boudreau, Co-Dean of the AFT’s Retiree Leaders Conference.

“During a session later in the day, Sam Luceshki, a former tech director for the SIG,” he said. “When you add technology, the power of the technology worked for us.”

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Embracing technology often requires an “attitude adjustment,” said Roger Boudreau, Co-Dean of the AFT’s Retiree Leaders Conference.

“During a session later in the day, Sam Luceshki, a former tech director for the SIG,” he said. “When you add technology, the power of the technology worked for us.”

“We incorporate all of the things we’ve done in the past—organizing, lobbying, making phone calls,” added Jim Carr, a retiree member of the New York State Public Employees Federation. “We hold rallies, we use Facebook, we write letters to the editor. We have to embrace what works.”
**RTF Executive Board Minutes October 7, 2013**

Members present: Annie-Marie Adduci, Anne Marie Broderick, Mary Cahalane, Martha Cotton, Larry Connolly, David Donovan, Chairman, Phil Fasano, Dotta Cooley-Hil-"..."
The high cost of low prices: Walmart protests educate the public

On the day after Thanksgiving Boston teachers joined with the Organized United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart) to educated holiday shoppers about the exploitative practices of the country’s leading retailer. Last month a photo of collection bins at an Ohio Walmart went viral. In front of the bins was a sign: Please donate food items here so Associates in Need can enjoy Thanksgiving Dinner. This photo went viral and sparked outrage across the country about Walmart’s corporate practices.

Former teacher and founder of DonorsChoose.org

Charles Best honored with New Frontier Award

Charles Best, CEO and founder of DonorsChoose.org, was recently honored at the Kennedy School of Government receiving one of this year’s New Frontier Awards. The New Frontier Award recognizes individuals who have positively changed their communities through public service.

Mr. Best worked at as a history teacher at a Bronx public high school when he was 24. He was dismayed to see that even basic supplies were considered luxuries. He knew there were many philanthropic people around, especially in NYC. He sketched out his plan with pen and paper and then enlisted the help of a programmer. He next cajoled his colleagues into submitting requests. Once they were funded, word spread into submitting requests. Once they were funded, word spread.

He finally decided to make a website of his own.

He has raised many millions of dollars for nearly half of all the public schools in the United States.

DonorsChoose.org is a group funding site. A project may cost $200 or $2,000, but a donor only need contribute as little as $1. Moreover, a donor can choose the project closest to his heart or even closest to his zip code. The idea is to bring many smaller donors together for a bigger project. The donors then get thank you notes and pictures of the students using the purchased supplies.

I was invited by DonorsChoose.org to attend New Frontier Awards ceremony last month.

Seeing Mr. Best receive his award and listening to him speak passionately about teachers and teaching, is one of the best ways to forget about the backhandedness and struggles of urban education. Many in the audience caught Mr. Best’s infectious enthusiasm. He need not convince me. I am currently seeking funding for my ninth project.

To date I have received $7,000 worth of supplies for my classroom. From magic markers to a document camera, DonorsChoose.org has helped me make my classroom experience a bit more enjoyable. The nicest aspect of the experience is that the supplies stay with the teacher even if the teacher changes schools. The only catch is that if a teacher leaves the profession, the supplies stay with the teacher even if the teacher changes schools. The only catch is that if a teacher leaves the profession, the supplies stay with the teacher.

I spoke with Mr. Best after the ceremony to thank him for helping all teachers. In his disarming way, he profusely thanked me for teaching students. He gave me his card and thanked me for teaching students. He gave me his card and thanked me for teaching students.