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# Boston Union Teacher



The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union

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## Mayor / Superintendent Release Proposed Legislation That Would Convert as Many as 48 Level 3 Schools to Turnaround Schools

*Bill Also Levels Playing Field for Some Charters  
While Encouraging Segregation in Others*

by Richard Stutman, BTU President

The mayor has recently filed legislation, supported by the superintendent, that would drastically alter school and teaching conditions at each of our Level 3 schools. The bill would also permit the establishment of charter schools that could select students by geographical area, a change that is likely to raise eyebrows among people who have faulted charters for already being able to cherry pick their students. On the other hand, the proposed legislation does have a few long-overdue components that would help level the playing field between charters and our public schools. The bill is sponsored by State Rep, **Marty Walz** (D-Back Bay/Beacon Hill), and will take its place alongside other competing pieces of legislation that propose to do many of the same things as the mayor's/superintendent's bill.

There is no specific timetable for discussion and determination of any of the above pieces of legislation. BTU Political Director **Angela Cristiani** ([acristiani@btu.org](mailto:acristiani@btu.org)) will keep us informed.

Below is the official summary of the legislation. (*The italicized comments and explanation below have been added and are mine. The comments are not meant to be all-inclusive.*)

You may access the complete package at the following <http://btu.org/legislation-politics/ma-legislative-highlights>

The summary below appears exactly as has been released.

### An Act Promoting Public School Success

Education reform legislation offered greater autonomy to several types of district schools, including Turnaround schools, Innovation schools, and Horace Mann charter schools. These efforts have produced strong academic results, and should be extended to serve a greater number of students. We know what is working in our schools and this bill builds on these efforts to close the achievement gap by:

- Extending "turn-around" powers and support grants to Level 3 schools

*Boston has somewhere between 39 and 48 level 3 schools. As we understand it, the number is in a bit of flux. This provision would essentially convert all to Turnaround Status, and subject each school to new teaching and learning conditions approved by a three-person panel, akin to what we have today imposed on our 11 Turnaround Schools. The key, immediate issue is what would happen to the estimated 1,500-2,500 staff currently assigned the 39-48 new Turnaround Schools (NTS). No NTS would be required to to*

*retain any incumbent staff member or 'accept' anyone from another NTS.*

*This would be bad enough, but consider that there are an additional dozen or so Turnaround Schools, and dozens of other schools with similar staff assignment models (Innovation, In-District Charter, and pilot) and the problem is clear: There are or will shortly be too many schools with the autonomy to reject anyone the school wishes.*

- Eliminating the cap on in-district charter schools and eliminating the requirement that renewal of these schools is based on union approval.

*As to the first point, see the answer above. As to the second, the union has been supportive of all renewals without exception. This is a non issue and if it makes it easier for in-district charter schools to renew, then the BTU is all for it.*

- Prioritizing enrollment for students with disabilities or ELLs in charter schools

*This sounds good and it's about time. But keep reading.*

- Building and maintaining programs for charter students with disabilities and ELLs through partnerships and coordination with District resources

*This will allow charters to 'send back' or contract out to the district the same students as above.*

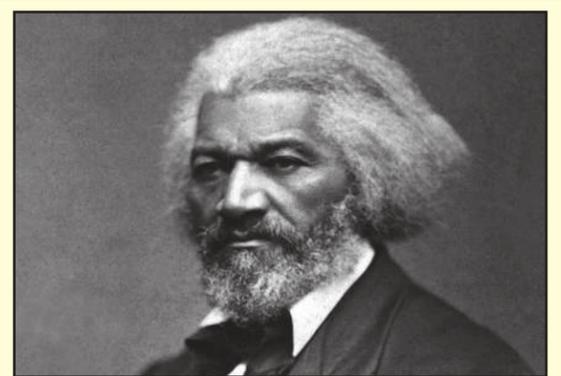
- Offering the same transportation services to both charter and district school students

*Finally. Charters have always gotten preference and have had access to citywide transportation - which is a lot better deal than our public school students get. So for example, a student from East Boston can get transportation cross district to the Renaissance Charter, located in Readville. That's a good deal.*

- Extending the school day (with compensation rates & schedule set outside of collective bargaining)

*Self explanatory. The superintendent would have the right to extend the day at whatever rate and for whatever duration she might want to. What's missing from the discussion? What about the quality of the time? And how much or how little is appropriate? Time for the sake of time should*

**Richard Stutman  
BTU President**



**Frederick Douglass**

**IN HONOR OF  
BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

### Blessings of Liberty and Education

(An excerpt from "Blessings of Liberty and Education" by Frederick Douglas on September 3, 1894 at the Industrial School of Manassas.)

The idea at the bottom of this Institution is rapidly gaining ground every where. Industrial education is, with me, however, no new idea. Nearly forty years ago I was its advocate, and at that time I held it to be the chief want of the free colored people of the North. I was then editor and publisher of the *North Star*, a newspaper printed in Rochester, New York I saw even then, that the free negro of the North, with every thing great expected of him, but with no means at hand to meet such expectations, could not hope to rise while he was excluded from all profitable employments. He was free by law, but denied the chief advantages of freedom; he was indeed but nominally free; he was not compelled to call any man his master, and no one could call him slave, but he was still in fact a slave, a slave to society, and could only be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. It was easier at that day to get a black boy into a lawyer's office to study law, or into a doctor's office to study medicine, than it was to get him into a carpenter's shop to push a plane, or into a blacksmith's shop to hammer iron.

While I have no sympathy whatever with those who affect to despise labor, even the humblest forms of it, and hold that whatever is needful to be done it is honorable to do, it is, nevertheless, plain that no people, white or black, can, in my country, continue long respected who are confined exclusively to mere menial service for which but little intelligence or skill are required, and for which but the smallest wages are paid or received; especially if the laborer does not make an effort to rise above that condition. While the employment as waiters at hotels and on steamboats and railroads, is perfectly proper and entirely honorable, in the circumstances which now surround the colored people, no one variety of the American people can afford to be known only as waiters and domestic servants.

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# Performance Evaluation 2013 and New Issues

By Patrick J. Connolly  
BTU Executive Vice President

With the start of a new calendar year many of us make resolutions to help ourselves reach goals we may have missed in 2012. These goals may be physical, spiritual, intellectual, financial, or professional. I know I have one or two that fall into each category. One professional goal for each of our members should be to attain or maintain an evaluation rating of Proficient or to achieve a rating of Exemplary.

For educators on a one year self-directed growth plan a Formative Assessment should occur mid-cycle (mid to late January or early February) which will provide written feedback and ratings to the Educator about his/her progress towards attaining the goals set forth in the Educator Plan. Written notice of the Assessment is required and then a signed copy is given to the Educator. The Educator shall sign the report within five school days of receipt indicating receipt, not agreement or disagreement with the contents.

Hopefully most educators will maintain or obtain a rating of Proficient. Some may reach Exemplary. There may, however, be some Educators who see their rating downgraded to Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory. This may result in a new Educator Plan, one with a shorter time span. It may also result in a change in the goals and action steps of the plan. These goals and action steps may be developed by the Evaluator. Consequences of this could be closer scrutiny of the educator's performance and more detailed prescriptions to improve performance. It may also prevent the educator from participating

in the Post Transfer Placement Process. If you find yourself in this situation contact the Elementary Field Rep. (Michael McLaughlin) or the Secondary Field Rep. (Caren Carew) immediately. The length of a directed growth plan ranges from 60 calendar days to a school year. The length of an improvement plan ranges from 30 calendar days to a school year. This is not a great deal of time to improve and demonstrate Proficiency. Likewise it places the individual educator under great stress.

There will continue to be workshops offered to assist members in preparing for their Formative Assessments. These will be posted on My Learning Plan and noticed in the BTU E-Bulletin. Take advantage of these if you have concerns or questions about the evaluation process or what is expected of you in this process. Preparation leads to success.

As this process unfolds there have already been several teachers who have received an "intent to dismiss" packet. This leads, usually, to a demand for a meeting with the evaluator and the start of a long, involved process. The grievance procedure in the new performance evaluation regulations and contract language has also changed. If there is a change in your plan status (*rating*) contact the BTU Office. There may be an error or omission that may be grievable in the assessment or evaluation. The need for new goals and action steps in a new shortened time period will bring new challenges to educators. The BTU will attempt to provide as much assistance as possible to these educators.

Another issue that has become more pressing is the question of the new

Sheltered English Immersion endorsement that will be required of educators in Massachusetts. Educators will be assigned to a cohort and will need to obtain the endorsement in order to obtain an initial license. Likewise "incumbent core teachers of ELLs who are assigned to a cohort for SEI training during the period covering SY 2013 through SY 2016, must obtain the SEI endorsement in order to renew, advance, or extend their license, subject to a hardship exception" (*Memo from Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester, 12/7/12*). There is a significant amount of time involved in this process and there will be varied programs offered to meet the requirements. Some educators who have completed Category Training may be able to take an abridged version of the requirements to gain the endorsement. The BPS should provide training at no cost to educators during the SY 2013 to SY 2016 transition period. If educators do not take the no cost opportunity, they will need to earn the endorsement at their own expense so they can renew, extend, or advance their license.

There will be discussion between the BPS and the BTU as to how this will

be implemented. Very little is certain at this point. Having a valid license is a criteria for employment. Many educators will be renewing their license(s) in 2014, so this issue is very timely.

This was not brought about by contract negotiations. This resulted from a Department of Justice complaint against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As soon as the BTU obtains further information it will be communicated to you.

It may seem that professional resolutions are being dictated by others and to an extent that is true. State and federal policies and regulations are placing more demands and requirements on educators. We are often reacting to these events. This can lead to an increase in stress and anxiety. Individuals need to remember to maintain some time for themselves so they can continue to stay healthy both physically and mentally. If any questions or concerns, please contact me at [pconnolly@btu.org](mailto:pconnolly@btu.org).



Patrick J. Connolly  
BTU Executive Vice President

## Mayor / Superintendent Release Proposed Legislation That Would Convert as Many as 48 Level 3 Schools to Turnaround Schools...

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not be the point. Lastly, this subject has been in discussion for 30 months, both in negotiations and after. Not once has the school district ever offered a specific proposal as to what activities (academic, enrichment, homework, structured/unstructured time, study time, and so on) ought to be part of the proposed extended day. Not one proposal has ever come forward from the district. Not one.

- Allowing for "neighborhood" charter schools in large cities through geographical enrollment preferences

*This is a very dangerous proposal: the setting up of charter schools by geographic region. The legislative safeguards are listed below. Decide if you think the safeguards are sufficient or mere window dressing that could permit what might amount to the establishment of segregated, private charter schools at the public expense.*

"...any charter school wishing to offer a geographical preference must include in its application for approval: (i) a definition of the geographical area for which it will offer an enrollment preference; (ii) an explanation of how this preference will support the mission of the charter school and the academic performance of its students; (iii) evidence that within this geographical area there resides an equal or higher percentage of low-income students, as measured by qualification for the free or reduced price lunch program, as the district as a whole; and (iv) an explanation of how the charter school will target its recruitment and retention efforts for students within this geographical area. When any charter school that chooses to offer a geographical preference seeks charter renewal and intends to continue applying the geographical preference, the board shall consider whether the preference area continues to support the mission of the charter school and the academic performance of its students, as well as whether the preference area continues to serve an adequate percentage of low-income students to qualify as a geographical preference area under this subsection..."

- Ensuring District input into the grade configuration and location of new charter schools

*This makes sense. If an area is over-saturated with elementary schools, then the next charter established ought not to be another elementary school*

- Incorporating a weighted student formula for charter school funding

*Good. 'Bout time. And let's make sure that that the money is returned on a pro-rata basis if/when a student leaves.*

- Streamlining the administrative process for the application, approval and management of Horace Mann charter schools

*No problem.*

- Supporting the growth of Innovation schools by clarifying the voting process and union approval requirements

*Good.*

- Allowing for single-sex schools, classes, and educational programs

*A bit of gimmickry maybe, but this is the type of issue that ought to be in the public domain, not just left to the superintendent to decide. Why not talk to teachers?*

## Commentary: Michael J. Maguire

### From Michigan to China, and Back Again

Two months ago, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder reversed his own pledge not to support right to work legislation and signed such a bill into law. As unthinkable as it might be, the home of America's strongest unions became the latest state to limit the power of workers.

The name Right To Work (RTW) is a great misnomer. Federal law already allows a new hire to refuse to join a union, and even to refuse to pay dues. However, that person would have to pay a lower "agency fee" which covers the cost of the union's negotiation on behalf of all.

Now in Michigan, any worker can refuse to pay anything to the union.

So far from being a "right to work," this legislation is intended to take money away from unions. Weak unions allow businesses and government to ride rough shot over its workers.

While we struggle as a nation to emerge from the Great Recession, it seems odd that corporations and governments need RTW language. After all, are there not tens of thousands of people looking for work? Are new hires demanding so much from an employer that the employer needs to break the union?

Today the answer is no, but the business world saw an opportunity in Michigan and lustily took it. Why? The answer is two words: global economy.

Michigan hopes to draw back a manufacturing base with RTW. Having been in Detroit last summer, I can attest to the need for more jobs in one of America's largest cities. Large sections of this once great city are empty. Literally nothing stands for blocks were tall buildings once dominated.

Will RTW in Michigan achieve its stated goal? I don't know; I doubt it. But I think it will achieve its unstated goal: making the American workplace look more like Asia and Latin America. So instead of outsourcing manufacturing and production beyond the Pacific or Rio Grande, corporations want to import non-union working conditions here. Or put another way,



Michael J. Maguire

corporations want to turn the clock by a century or more.

On March 25, 1911, New York City saw its worst industrial disaster to date. 146 garment workers died in a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. On September 12, 2012, at least 289 people

died in a fire in garment factory in Karachi, Pakistan. What have we learned in the intervening century? We have learned that when American workers banded together for better and safer working conditions, the business left to other countries. Sadly, in this global economy, the US allows in products from foreign factories that, due to poor work place safety, would not be allowed to operate on our own soil.

But with Michigan and other states changing their laws around what workers can do together, America is making our soil more hospitable for businesses. And at least on major business has responded.

Apple announced recently that it would begin manufacturing in the US. Details are still scarce, but it appears that the growing demand for wages in China is a contributing factor in Apple's move.

It's a great irony that as the Chinese workers call for better wages and working conditions, it's the American workers who appear to be suffering.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy.)

## BTU Phone Numbers

Office .....	617-288-2000
Health & Welfare .....	617-288-0500
AFT Massachusetts .....	617-423-3342
Function Office .....	617-288-3322
Lounge Office .....	617-288-3322
Vision Center .....	617-288-5540
Tremont Credit Union .....	781-843-5626

## 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 on an approved maternity leave, and the like. The following process is in addition to contacting the school or BPS sub-central when notifying the employer of one's absence. The BPS monitors sick leave in order to detect what it perceives as 'patterns' of absences which it could constitute as abuse. If this occurs, the administration treats it as a disciplinary matter. If a pattern has been established through due process following the guidelines as set forth in the Superintendent's Circular on *Employee Discipline Procedures* [HRS-PP-10], then teachers can be required to furnish 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 grieve it immediately.

The "Employee Sick Leave Policy" can be found in Superintendent's Circular HRS-PP-12. It details that all absences for 6 or more consecutive days [absences interrupted by weekends and/or holidays are considered consecutive] must be completely documented by a physician's letter that follows the following protocol which is the same used for the letter required for a medical leave of absence as well. The physician's letter must be on the doctor's letterhead and must include: the full name of the employee identified as their patient; the general nature of the reason why they are absent and that due to this issue the patient is currently unable to perform their duties as a teacher; the anticipated date of the employee's return to work [month, day, year] and if the return date is unknown they must indicate the exact date when the person will next be evaluated by the doctor to determine their ability to return to work; letter signed by a physician [not a nurse practitioner, social worker, psychologist, etc.]. If the latter is the case, the employee must obtain an updated physician's letter at that appointment utilizing this protocol with a new date of return detailed. Failure to submit the required letter(s) in a timely basis can result in discipline.

It is the employees' responsibility to submit said letters to BPS Human Resources, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 26 Court Street to the attention of Marsha Jabour. She can be reached at 617-635-9616 or [mjabour@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:mjabour@boston.k12.ma.us). Never assume letters have been received. It is best to confirm by email to have said documentation in writing and/or to have two copies hand delivered to said office and have one copy time/date stamped and retained in the employees personal files at home in order to have the proof of submittal if needed in the future.

### When Do Programming Preference Sheets Come Out?

The contract states, "No later than February 1<sup>st</sup>, programming preference sheets shall be distributed to all teachers." For High and Middle School teachers it reads, "Programming preference will be honored

to the extent consistent with the provisions of this Agreement [contract]. All preference sheets shall be returned by March 1." This means that a 'preference' is just that, it does not mean that the teacher is guaranteed their choice as submitted.

The contract also details, "On or before February 1, a list of all non-teaching assignments for which administrative periods are given in a teachers' program shall be posted in each school. These assignments may be applied for in the teacher's program preference sheet as herein [within the contract] provided.

An applicant for such a non-teaching assignment who does not receive the assignment shall, upon his/her request, be given the reasons for not having been selected by the Principal or Headmaster."

### Do Specialty Teachers Receive Common Professional Development Time?

There is a new Article VII in the contract that states; "All specialty teachers such as but not limited to art, music, physical education, guidance, district-wide shall meet as a group at least once annually during the contractual school year for a professional development day, on one of the city-wide all schools professional development days already scheduled on the academic calendar."

### 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 AFTMA 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 employees, not gifts to public agencies. You may give gifts 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 exemption to permit class gifts to teachers. A teacher may accept a gift, or several gifts during the school year, from public school students and/or their parents and guardians, with an aggregated value

of up to \$150, if the gift is identified only as being from the class, and the identity of the givers and the individual amounts given are not identified to the recipient. Gifts received pursuant to this exemption are not required to be disclosed. The donor is unknown, so 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 the teacher a \$150 gift certificate to a book store, indicating that it is a class gift. The teacher may accept the \$150 class gift certificate and no disclosure is required. The teacher may not knowingly accept any additional gift from any of the parents who participated in the class gift.

A teacher may accept a class gift and also individual gifts from persons who did not contribute to the class gift. Unlike class gifts, which are not required to be disclosed, individual gifts must be disclosed if, based on the specific circumstances, a reasonable person might think that the teacher's actions would be influenced by the gift. Example: A child who did not participate in the class gift gives a plate of homemade cookies to the teacher. The teacher may accept the cookies, and no disclosure is required, because a reasonable person would not think that the teacher would be influenced by a gift that has no retail value. Similarly, a teacher would not be required to disclose acceptance of other homemade food items, hand-picked (not

purchased) bouquets of flowers, and handmade gifts, candy, or other gift items worth less than \$10, because a reasonable person would not think that the teacher might unduly show favor to the giver of such gifts or the giver's child, or be influenced by the giver. Example: Parents of a child who did not contribute to a class gift and whose child is awaiting a college recommendation gives the teacher who is writing the recommendation a bottle of wine worth \$40. The teacher must disclose the gift in writing to her appointing authority, because a reasonable person might think that such a gift might influence the teacher to write a better recommendation for the student.

The following is the link to the required disclosure: [11d. Disclosure of Appearance of Undue Favor or Improper Influence required by section 23\(b\)\(3\)](#)

### How Does a Person With Disabilities Apply for Reasonable Accommodations at Work?

The BPS policy Superintendent's Circular EQT-1, 'Employees with Disabilities - Rights & Responsibilities', commits to non-discrimination against qualified persons with disabilities to education programs

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Caren Carew

## BTU ELECTIONS

Are you interested in running for either union office or as a delegate to various educational conferences? If so, please pick up nomination papers at the BTU office. Signed papers are due at the March membership meeting (3/13/13).

## Boston Union Teacher

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#### EDITORIAL NOTE:

The opinions expressed in the *Boston Union Teacher* do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or those of its members.

#### 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](mailto:letters@btu.org).

#### DEADLINE:

The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is February 15th.

All copy should be e-mailed to [gvirchick@btu.org](mailto:gvirchick@btu.org) and [mmaguire@btu.org](mailto:mmaguire@btu.org). This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

### Retirement Seminar

with

MICHAEL W. McLAUGHLIN

BTU ELEMENTARY FIELD REPRESENTATIVE and Trustee, State-Boston Retirement Board  
Along with staff from the State-Boston Retirement System, Group Health, Social Security and the BTU Retired Teachers Chapter

Thursday, March 21, 2013

4:00 PM - BTU HALL

email [awashington@btu.org](mailto:awashington@btu.org) to reserve your seat

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# Day of Service for Young Achievers School – Developing Leaders Through Community Service

Community service prompts us to think beyond ourselves, work together, and strengthen our community. It is a familiar term, particularly in a mid-winter month honoring **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** with a National Service Day on a Saturday, and the MLK Day of Service on a federal Monday holiday.

On Friday, January 18, students and teachers from an urban school in Mattapan answered the call of Dr. King and grew as leaders in the process.

The first Mattapan Day of Service at Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot School K-8 sent 527 students and more than 100 teachers and staff throughout Mattapan to volunteer at community organizations. Participants raised the spirits of hospitalized children, initiated a town cleanup campaign, constructed animal enrichment toys at Franklin Park Zoo, made displays for the local library, visited seniors in elder care, beautified neighborhoods and improved their school building.

“Martin Luther King gave his life to make the world a better place, and more fair for all of us,” Young Achievers Principal **Virginia Chalmers** told her students. “Part of honoring his legacy is giving service to our community.”

Today is a day that we commit all of our time and energy to make the world a better place close to our school.”

Volunteering for an average of four hours each for a school total of more than 2500 hours of service, Young Achievers students and teachers spent the day answering what Dr. King called life’s most persistent question: “What are you doing for others?”

Students had clear ideas about what they wanted to do, and community organizations opened their doors, including Boston Family Boat Building, Boston Nature Center, Boston Police Department B-3, Boston Public Library – Mattapan Campus, Boston Public Schools Science Department, City Councilor Charles Yancey’s Office, City Year Boston, Colorado Street Neighborhood Association, District Attorney Daniel Conley’s Office, Foley Senior Residences, Franklin Park Zoo, Haitian Adult Day Center, Hearth at Olmstead Green, Margaret Shea Day Health Program, Mattapan Community Health Center, Mattapan Food and Fitness, Mattapan PACE, Roxbury Cool Smiles, Mattapan Small Smiles, Perfect Family Dental, and the Suffolk County Sheriff Department.

At the Mattapan Community Health

Center, second graders greeted visitors, served them hot chocolate and coffee, and read them stories. In the bright community room near the front door of the clinic, students huddled around tables, reading aloud to strangers from the pages of their favorite books. Other students stirred sweeteners or creamer into coffee and packets of cocoa into water as they prepared hot drinks for people coming and going on this frigid day.

Student **Michael Collins** showed a visitor his book about professional wrestler and actor John Cena. “Can I read it to you?” he asked. She nodded, and they sat on a cushioned bench along the wall as she sipped her coffee and listened to the story about his hero.

“People are leaving a lot happier,” said **Elijah Rooks**, security officer in the lobby at the center, noting the affect the students had on guests that morning. “I think seeing the kids makes people smile.” Eighth grade students played a leadership role throughout the day, helping teachers and students at each service site. Working with the second graders at the health center, eighth grader **Dimitri Moore** was impressed.

“They’re very energetic, but they like using their energy to help people” he noted. “Most of them were not afraid to approach people. I think that’s what leaders of the future really need. It inspires me. These kids have so much confidence in themselves, and they have so much change in them – it shows me that I’m still young and I can still change the world as I am.”

“Our experience on Service Day is an important reminder of how significant an opportunity it can be for middle school students to be a mentor for younger ones,” noted Chalmers. “Their most mature and pro-social behavior can emerge in these contexts. It was moving to see each and every one of the eighth graders stepping up to the leadership opportunity afforded by the day. It is one of the opportunities



that being a K-8 school ought to provide frequently, but somehow we are unable to fit it in too often.”

At the Haitian Adult Day Health Center on Frontenac Street in Dorchester, third grade students from teacher **Caroline Alexis’** class worked side-by-side with Haitian elders to prepare health kits for students in Haiti. Many of the retirees have grandchildren back in their home country. At long tables in a packed meeting room with Haitian music playing in the background, they made a hundred kits, filling each plastic bag with a coloring book, post-it note pad, a box of crayons, a pencil, and a handmade card written in both English in Haitian Creole, stating: “Dear Friend. Someday I would like to meet you. I live in the U.S.”

*Your new friend...*

Supplies for the kits were donated by the Boston Police Department District B-3, which also contributed time and resources to the overall success of Service Day. They provided two police vans to transport the students to various sites, suggested partner sites that could be included in the day, and participated at the school, with two officers arriving Friday morning to help with painting projects.

Third grade teacher **Rina Wolok** took her students to Hearth at Olmstead Green to practice reading skills, make “Keeping Mattapan Green” signs, and have lunch with the residents. After a morning of reading together, sharing stories, and eating, the conversations flowed between students and seniors. “This is a very long time for the students to seem so happy and calm,” said Wolok. “They love the one-on-one attention. The older adults have a calming influence on them.”

The benefits were mutual. An elderly man with serious ailments said the students helped him feel that getting up was worth it, and made him thankful for another day.

At another senior residence, dance instructor and choreographer **Gina Jones’** fourth grade students performed an Indian Bollywood dance infused with the latest gangnam-style moves. Approximately 20 residents of the Foley Senior Residences in Mattapan watched the performance in a sunny community room. “This shows the scholars how to give back in a way that isn’t materialistic,” said Jones. “They are sharing their spirit and their youth and engaging with the audience. Service can mean so many different things. This is live, traveling performance and shows you can do service through being artistic.”

Foley resident **Gerri Wooten** danced from her chair during the performance, and reminisced about doing the cha-cha in her youth. “It’s beautiful. We see the joy in the students’ faces, and they see that they’re making us feel good,” she said.

“They’re doing something important. They put a smile on all our faces today.”

At the Boston Nature Center, 6th grade students constructed wildlife habitats, painted furnishings for a new preschool, and painted flags representing the dozens of countries of origin for Young Achievers families. It was important to have all the flags represented, said teacher **Jenna Hadley** and her students, because Martin Luther King wanted everyone to be together. “Everyone should be equal,” said a student, “so we display the flags of all and everyone is united.”

Chalmers spent Service Day at the school participating in school-based projects. “The school was abuzz with positive energy,” she said. Seventh grade students stenciled lockers with the school’s “habits of mind” words – creativity, perseverance, equity, investigation, evidence, and connection. They constructed wood blocks for use in dramatic play, and worked with City Year Corps members to paint murals for the school building. Younger students made cards, necklaces, and blankets for patients at Children’s Hospital, painted vegetable signs, and made flowerpots for Mattapan Food and Fitness. Students initiated a “Keep YA Clean” campaign, cleaned up the yard and cleared out a basement closet for a new school store.

“We work hard to teach students the idea of responsibility so it not only strengthens their learning but also strengthens their sense of community,” said **Carol Murray**, assistant principal at Young Achievers. “We develop projects so kids become and see themselves as leaders in their community. Then when there is a problem in the community – rather than internalize and feel poorly about it – they have a means for thinking about ways they can participate in changing it.”

Chalmers’ goal for Service Day was met. In one day, students felt the connection their classes made with community groups. “They experienced the difference that collective action can make in their communities,” she said.

“Our students brought such joy to the communities they visited, and what they gained individually and collectively can’t be measured on any standardized test,” said Murray. “One only had to watch to know that it impacted our students deeply.”

At the end of Service Day, **José Ruiz**, in the Sheltered English Immersion classroom for students whose first language is Spanish, had a question. Upon returning to class, he asked, “Mrs. M., what is the word for...pena?”

Wait; it is not pena...I know! It’s love sadness. Yes, that’s what I feel. That’s how I feel when we had to go.

And you did too, Mrs. M! When can we go back?”



## A Talk to Teachers

(Excerpts from: "A Talk to Teachers" by James Baldwin)

*Historical Context: When James Baldwin gave his talk for teachers it was 100 years since the Emancipation Proclamation. Much of the civil rights legislation had yet to be passed. George Wallace, governor of Alabama, was barring black students from the state university. Martin Luther King had been jailed in Birmingham and 4 teenage girls had been murdered in the bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.*

*On the positive side the March on Washington and King's "I Had a Dream" speech had inspired a nation. President John F. Kennedy had called for an end to "Jim Crow Laws". Malcolm X had brought together urban forces in protest. Martin was the conscience of the movement. Malcolm was the passion of the movement. And James Baldwin embodied the anger and the memory of an oppressed people. There was hope and there was possibility.*



James Baldwin

society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society...

Now, if what I have tried to sketch has any validity, it becomes thoroughly clear, at least to me, that any Negro who is born in this country and undergoes the American educational system runs the risk of becoming schizophrenic. On the one hand he is born in the shadow of the stars and stripes and he is assured it represents a nation which has never lost a war. He pledges allegiance to that flag which guarantees "liberty and justice for all." He is part of a country in which anyone can become president, and so forth. But on the other hand he is also assured by his country and his countrymen that he has never contributed anything to civilization — that his past is nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured...

All this enters the child's consciousness much sooner than we as adults would like to think it does. As adults, we are easily fooled because we are so anxious to be fooled. But children are very different. Children, not yet aware that it is dangerous to look too deeply at anything, look at everything, look at each other, and draw their own conclusions. They don't have the vocabulary to express what they see, and we, their elders, know how to intimidate them very easily and very soon. But a black child, looking at the world around him, though he cannot know quite what to make of it, is aware that there is a reason why his mother works so hard, why his father is always on edge. He is aware that there is some reason why, if he sits down in the front of the bus, his father or mother slaps him and drags him to the back of the

bus. He is aware that there is some terrible weight on his parents' shoulders which menaces him. And it isn't long — in fact it begins when he is in school — before he discovers the shape of his oppression...

...I began by saying that one of the paradoxes of education was that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person. And on the basis of the evidence — the moral and political evidence — one is compelled to say that this is a backward society...

Now if I were a teacher in this school, or any Negro school, and I was dealing with Negro children, who were in my care only a few hours of every day and would then return to their homes and to the streets,

children who have an apprehension of their future which with every hour grows grimmer and darker, I would try to teach them — I would try to make them know — that those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies by which they are surrounded, are criminal... I would teach him that there are currently very few standards in this country which are worth a man's respect. That it is up to him to change these standards for the sake of the life and the health of the country. I would suggest to him that the popular culture — as represented, for example, on television and in comic books and in movies — is based on fantasies created by very ill people, and he must be aware that these are fantasies that have nothing to do with reality. I would teach him that the press he reads is not as free as it says it is — and that he can do something about that, too. I would try to make him know that just as American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it, so is the world larger, more daring, more beautiful and more terrible, but principally larger — and that it belongs to him.

*(Delivered October 16, 1963, as "The Negro Child — His Self-Image"; originally published in The Saturday Review, December 21, 1963, reprinted in The Price of the Ticket, Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985, Saint Martins 1985.)*

*Historical Context from Tyde Pass of Work For Quality Schools.*

### Blessing of Liberty and Education...

(continued from page 1)

While I say this, I fully believe in the dignity of all needful labor. All honest effort to better human conditions is entitled to respect. I have met at Poland Springs, in the State of Maine, and at the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and at other places, as well as at the late World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, many young white ladies and gentlemen, who were truly such, students and teachers in high schools and seminaries, gladly serving as waiters during their vacation, and doing so with no sense of being degraded in any degree, or embarrassed by such service. This would not have been the case with them, if society, by any law or custom, had decided that this service should be, for such persons, their only calling and vocation in life. Daniel Webster used to say that New Hampshire was a good State to emigrate from. So I say of menial service — it is a good condition to separate from, just as soon as one can find any other calling, which is more remunerative and more elevating in its tendency. It is not the labor that degrades, but the want of spirit to rise above it.

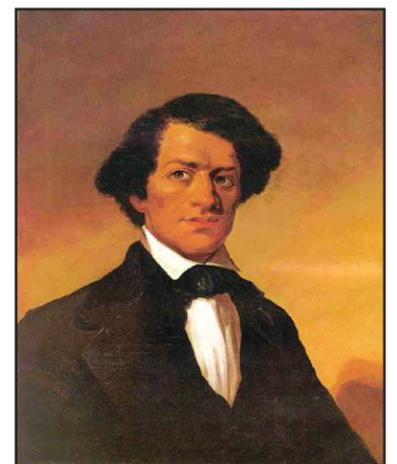
Exclusive service, or exclusive mastery, is not good for the moral or mental health of any class. Pride and insolence will certainly be developed in the one class, and weakness and servility in the other. The colored people, to be respected, must furnish their due proportion to each class. They must not be all masters, or all servants. They must command, as well as be commanded.

However much I may regret that it was my lot to have been a slave, I shall never regret that I was once a common laborer; a servant, if you please so to term it. But I felt myself as much a man then, as I feel myself a man now; for I had an ambition above my calling, and I was determined then, as I have been ever since, to use every honorable means in my power to rise to a higher plane of service, just as soon and as fast as that should be possible.

My philosophy of work is, that a man is worked upon by that upon which he works. Some work requires more muscle than it does mind. That work which requires the most thought, skill and ingenuity, will receive the highest commendation, and will otherwise do most for the worker. Things which can be done simply with the exertion of muscle, and with little or no exertion of the intellect, will develop the muscle, but dwarf the mind.

Long ago it was asked, "How can he get wisdom, who holdeth the plow and whose talk is of oxen?"

The school which we are about to establish here, is, if I understand its object, intended to teach the colored youth, who shall avail themselves of its privileges, the use of both mind and body. It is to educate the hand as well as the brain; to teach men to work as well as to think, and to think as well as to work. It is to teach them to join thought to work, and thus to get the very best result of thought and work. There is in my opinion, no useful thing that a man can do, that cannot be better done by an educated man than by an uneducated one.



Frederick Douglass

#### BTU DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

This year there will be 16 scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 awarded to high school seniors who are dependents of BTU members. To apply, please obtain an application from Jeanne Turner in the Union office or download the form from the BTU website and return with: a transcript of the dependent's last two years of academic work; 2) evidence of acceptance by an accredited college, junior college, vocational school or equivalent institution; 3) member's notarized federal tax return for the year 2012; and 4) a one-page statement of the dependent's professional goals. The application and the four supporting documents **must be received in the Union office no later than Monday, April 22, 2013.** The recipients of the scholarships will be notified by May 20, 2012.

#### RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIPS

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

Applications for these scholarships may be picked up at the RTC/BTU offices at 180 Mt. Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125 or they can be downloaded from the BTU website. **The deadline to apply is April 22, 2013.** Envelopes must be postmarked by this date.

# The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

After reading Michelle Alexander's exhaustive study *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* this indisputable fact should make every teacher, every American stand up and question the War on Drugs. Although an African American is not significantly more likely than a white man to use or sell prohibited drugs they are made criminals at drastically higher rates. In fact studies show that white professionals are far more likely to be engaged in criminal drug activity and yet are the least likely group to be criminals because of it. Since Ronald Reagan declared the War on Drugs three-fourths of those imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino. In 2000, *Human Rights Watch* reported that in seven states 80-90% of those sent to prison for drug offenses were African-American. In at least 15 states blacks are admitted to prison on drug related charges at rates from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than that of white men. Alexander's book explores reasons for how and why we got to this place.

In a sweeping look at the different means of control utilized by the wealthy throughout time to obtain cheap labor Alexander puts this system of mass incarceration into historical perspective. In the 1600's, before there was any concept of race, the wealthy landowners of the North American British colonies looked down on white indentured servants and black slaves with equal contempt. There was not much difference in their plight. Whites and blacks worked together and relaxed together. But in 1675 Nathaniel Bacon sought to unite indentured servants, black slaves, and poor whites against the property owners. After putting down what came to be known as Bacon's rebellion the planter elite did away with indentured servitude, extended certain privileges to poor whites including access to land, passed laws prohibiting meetings between blacks and whites, and instituted the system of racialized chattel slavery that would last for another 180 years during which time great wealth was accumulated from the toil and misery of African slaves.

After the Civil War, there was a period of hope for the ex-slaves during the time of Reconstruction. Federal occupation of the South brought a brief moment of hope for the newly-emancipated slaves. But Southern plantation owners sought to institute new controls to maintain their economic dominance. After the 1876 election of Rutherford B. Hayes and with it the selling out of Reconstruction new laws were instituted. What came to be known as Jim Crow lasted almost 100 years until the civil rights struggles and passages of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Again there was a brief moment of hope. Again the elite fought back in efforts to divide white and black and maintain their economic advantage.

Alexander brings you back to the 1968 presidential campaign of Richard Nixon. Hoping to capitalize on fear Nixon ran on a law and order message. Cynically characterizing political demonstrations as criminal activity he narrowly defeated the Democrat Hubert Humphrey. But the conservative revolution did not reach full development until Ronald Reagan. Seeking to drive a wedge between working class whites and blacks he ran on an anti-busing, anti-affirmative action platform with racialized characterizations of so called "welfare queens" bombarding the voters. During the campaign race was not mentioned...but was certainly implicit in the propaganda.

At the campaign kickoff in Philadelphia, Mississippi... a town where 3 civil rights activists were murdered in 1964... Reagan promised the crowd that he believed in states' rights, a demand repeatedly invoked by racist Southern politicians during the Civil Rights struggle.

This Southern strategy worked and every politician since, Republican or Democrat, has been fearful of appearing soft on crime. While in office Reagan declared the War on Drugs... even though an overwhelming majority of Americans at the time did not think drugs were a big criminal issue, with many seeing addiction as a public health problem. But with the emergence of crack cocaine and images continuously coming from the Reagan camp of crack addicted mothers and crack babies the hook was set. Later George Bush used the image of released convicted rapist Willie Horton in a blatant racist appeal to fear. Bill Clinton, looking to wrest the law and order mantle from Republicans oversaw an expansion of the drug laws and the financing of more and more prisons. Clinton also presided over the dismantling of the welfare system replacing it with block grants to the states. Anyone convicted of a drug crime was barred from receiving public assistance. The "tough on crime" legislation during his presidency resulted in the largest increase in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history. Even Barack Obama with his choice of Joe Biden for vice-president and Rahm Emanuel for chief of staff, two strident supporters of the drug war, has shown a willingness to go along with current policies.

Throughout the book Michelle Alexander picks apart the criminal justice system and how it has been manipulated to incarcerate millions of black men. From the passages of laws, to the federal incentives dangled in front of police departments, to the choice of targeting inner city communities rather than college campuses, and the Supreme Court decisions that have upheld the targeting of black and brown men with questionable search and seizure practices, Alexander paints a picture of control that has resulted in tens of millions of arrests and convictions for crimes that are essentially of a non-violent nature. She also shows how the expense of legal representation as well as the fear of serving many years in jail for drug offenses has created a situation where black defendants accused of drug crimes often accept reduced sentences. For many inner city communities around the country this has been catastrophic with as many as 75% and up of the young men being court involved and labeled as felons for the rest of their lives.

Just as Jim Crow laws such as literacy requirements for voting and poll taxes kept generation after generation of African-Americans politically disenfranchised the New Jim Crow excludes many felons and ex-felons from involvement in the political process. Many states formally restrict ex-felons from voting. One in seven black men have lost the right to vote since the War on Drugs. In some states, the numbers are closer to one in four. This does not take into account those restricted from voting

in states that impose fines or fees on ex-felons before voting rights are restored. In addition many prisons are located far from the urban centers in small rural communities. Although prisoners in most states

do not get the right to vote the prison population is counted for the small towns, greatly increasing populations and therefore representation in state houses. Alexander reminds us of the 3/5ths

law that counted slaves as 3/5 of a human being for purposes of appropriating delegates to the House of Representatives. In addition, ex-felons are further stripped of democratic rights by being excluded from jury selection. With the Supreme Court sanctioning of race-based peremptory strikes by allowing "silly" and "superstitious" reasons for striking black jurors this often means black defendants in shackles facing all-white juries. Not much different from Jim Crow times.

Alexander exposes as lies the claims that felon status is glorified in the black community. The shame of being labeled a criminal haunts the "felon" and their families. The stigma follows the felon around as he looks for work, knowing that checking the box on job applications means almost no chance of employment. Because ex-felons are barred from housing assistance and relief many end up returning to a life of drugs and then eventually are returned to prison.

The old Jim Crow was easy to expose to most people not blinded by racial prejudice. As a result a huge movement was built to dismantle it. The New Jim Crow on the other hand is less easily exposed. After all, aren't these people simply making the wrong choices? Alexander reminds us of the devastating effect the deindustrialization of America has had

in post industrial America?

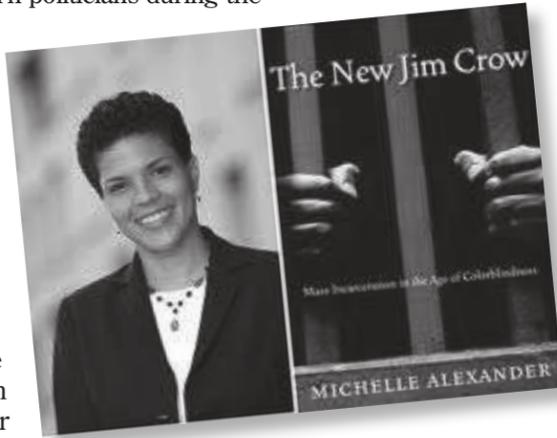
As teachers in urban public schools it is incumbent on us to educate ourselves about this New Jim Crow and the mass incarceration that has resulted from it. Our schools are not immune from the fear that Ronald Reagan and others have used to fuel this War on Drugs. Rather than see drugs and drug addiction as a public health problem we are often complicit in what has been called the school to prison pipeline. The charters are the worst. Rather than deal with the "behavior" issues that often come with young men and women caught up in drugs they shuttle their problems back to the public schools. And then, when back in our schools, the lack of services and the real disruptions that do occur in our classroom can too often make us complicit in this pipeline to prison. The high suspension rates that are in too many of our schools is a band-aid that will not stop the bleeding the War on Drugs has caused.

Michelle Alexander calls for a new people's movement, much like the Poor People's Movement advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr. before a white racist's bullet took him from us. Like King she believes that a human rights movement, one that demands all human beings be treated with dignity with the right to food, shelter, health care, education and security has the revolutionary potential to unite blacks and working class whites, also victims of the drug war, against the mass incarceration ideology of the ruling elite.

There is much more in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* than I can possibly write about in this short review. Michelle Alexander's brilliant writing will compel you to question previously held assumptions about the War on Drugs. I urge you to read it and start discussions of it with your colleagues. As teachers in urban schools we are on the front lines of this war. Reading this book will help you determine on which side of the line you belong.



Garret Virchick



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## Hey BTU Members!

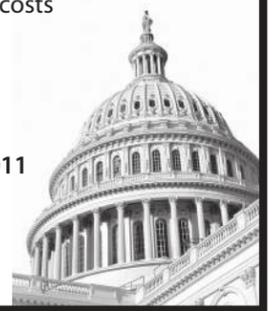
Did you know that you can apply to attend the AFT's Professional Learning Conference (AFT TEACH) in Washington, D.C. this summer?

A new BTU policy offers an opportunity for BTU members to be funded for attending the AFT TEACH Conference. You can find out more about your national Union and attend high-quality Professional Development!

July 22-24, 2013  
Washington, D.C.

Be on the lookout for an application in March. The BTU will pay the costs of travel, registration and a shared hotel room.

For information about the last conference, see <http://www.aft.org/teach2011>



## Reflections on MLK, Jr. and Charter School Suspension Rates

Today as a nation we celebrate two remarkable events. First, we honor the life and the work of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** who died fighting to make our country a more compassionate, just and equitable society. We also celebrate the second inauguration of our first African American President – an indication that our country has made great strides in fulfilling Dr. King’s legacy, something I believe should make us all very proud.

But as a teacher in the urban district of Boston, and as a proud and active member of the Boston Teachers union, I think it is important to point out that some horrible and discriminatory policies are being enacted in American education policy right now – often under the banner of “civil rights” and with the implicit suggestion that folks like Dr. King would be on the side of those who consider themselves to be a part of the “Education Reform Establishment”. Undoubtedly at some point today, some billionaire-funded education “reformer” will invoke Dr. King’s name as they attempt to rationalize what they and their wealthy supporters are doing to poor kids and public education in the name of ‘civil rights’. But I believe that if Dr. King knew what was happening in charter schools and American education policy today that he would be outraged.

For more than a decade now the charter school movement has been blatantly lying to American taxpayers about their mission and purpose. They have taken billions of dollars of public funding from school districts that usually serve the poorest and neediest kids with the explicit promise that they will use those funds to educate the same exact kids and get better results than traditional schools. Why? Because charter advocates claim that traditional schools are “burdened” by ‘unionized teachers and bureaucracy’. In the process of making these arguments they have completely demonized traditional public schools and teachers, as well as the unions that represent us.

But now multiple years worth of data show that charter schools are not even remotely close to fulfilling the promise of educating all children. The vast majority of charters are instead de facto private schools that cherry-pick and ‘cream’ the kids who are best prepared to learn. Charters are also openly discriminating against kids who do not speak English, those who are classified as Special Education, and those who have emotional and behavior issues. Charter schools have become a sorting mechanism for those kids that the mostly white (and private school educated) Ed Reform establishment deem as worth ‘saving’, and those who will be herded into schools that are populated by the underachievers and the most difficult to teach.

One of the most reprehensible practices that many charter schools engage in is enforcing a system of discipline that is nothing short of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century version of Jim Crow in urban schools. In places like Massachusetts and Washington, DC, charter schools are suspending upwards of 50% of their students in a given year (compared to their traditional urban counterparts which usually suspend between 5-20%). Charter school proponents say that this type of discipline is necessary to maintain order, but the unwritten purpose of such harsh discipline is to create a culture of fear that pushes out the neediest and often most vulnerable kids. Not to mention that when traditional schools experience discipline problems, charter school proponents blame the teachers and our unions. But apparently when charter schools experience similar problems it is okay for them

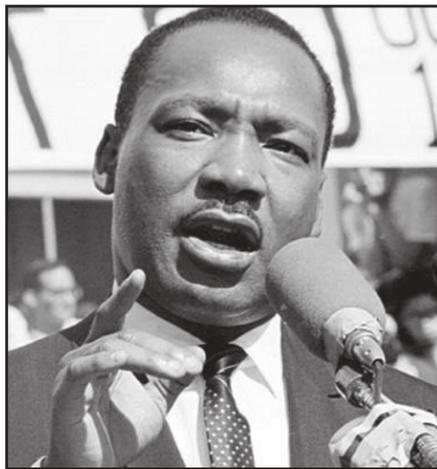
to blame the children.

Sadly, or maybe I should say thankfully, a small number of charter school proponents have not only come out and admitted that this is happening, but at least one has said that we should actually be celebrating it. **Mike Petrilli**, a leading charter school proponent whose own biography refers to him as “one of the nation’s foremost education analysts,” says:

“To be sure, this raises tough questions for the system as a whole... there are reasons to be concerned that district schools will become the last resort for the toughest-to-serve kids... But in life there are trade-offs, and I would be willing to accept a somewhat less ideal outcome for the most-challenged students if it meant tremendously better life outcomes for their peers... Misguided notions of “equity” have turned many public school systems into leveling leviathans. We shouldn’t let the same happen to charters, the last salvation of the strivers.”

If you doubt any of what I am saying then I encourage you to read all of Mr. Petrilli’s comments for yourself at <http://tinyurl.com/axk2gr8>

Some of my favorite quotes come from the late, great Clarence Darrow – an early 20th century lawyer who was involved in some of the most famous cases of his day. One quote (or paraphrase) that I use often comes from his testimony before a Senate sub-committee on behalf of striking coal miners when he said (and I am going to



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

paraphrase here): the most important question in all of public policy today comes down to whether or not we are going to remake institutions to meet the needs of individuals, or whether we are going to remake individuals to meet the needs of institutions?

That is and always has been the central debate of public education in the United States, and I am proud to be on the side of the individual. The truth is that there are many challenges facing American public education – particularly in urban communities. But as educators (and as the guardians and caretakers of children’s lives and futures), we should work to build institutions that serve the needs of every child. We should not set kids up to fail so

that our schools can maintain reputations for high test scores. We should not sort children into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ with systems of high stakes exams. We should never create outrageously unfair systems of school discipline that are explicitly designed to set children up for failure. We should not use billions of dollars to create private school-like experiences for small enclaves of kids at the expense of millions of other (mostly poor) children. We should never demonize those who dedicate their lives to helping others, and we should never, ever cynically dismiss efforts to end or mitigate the horrors of poverty as ‘misguided notions of equity.’ (As an aside, how does someone who claims to be fighting for civil rights ever use such a phrase?)

These kinds of practices have no place in public policy that deals with the lives and futures of children.

And as we honor Dr. King today, we must remember that he would never stand for this type of vision or rhetoric, and neither should we. Instead we should work together to identify those strategies and reforms that actually work - the ones that are good for kids and communities, and then we should fight like hell to find the resources and political courage necessary to create a system of public education that offers hope, opportunity, and prosperity to all God’s children.

(Ted Chambers teaches history at the Edwards Middle School.)

### Know Your Rights...

(continued from page 3)

and employment practices in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A person with disabilities is defined as a person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, (2) has a record of such impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such impairment, most of which require legal interpretations. Examples of the range of disabilities include:

- \* *Non-ambulatory disabilities* – physical impairments requiring use of a wheelchair;
- \* *Semi-ambulatory disabilities* – physical impairments causing a person to walk with difficulty (with or without aides);
- \* *Coordination disabilities* – impairments of muscle control to limbs, resulting in faulty coordination;
- \* *Sight disabilities;*
- \* *Hearing disabilities;*
- \* *Speech impairments;*
- \* *Learning disabilities;*
- \* *Mental or psychological disorders* – impairments effecting normal mental processes or emotional stability.

Section 504 defines a “Qualified Disabled Person” for employment purposes if they meet legitimate skill experience, education, or other requirements of an employment position, and who can perform the ‘essential functions’ of the position with or without reasonable accommodations. If the individual is qualified by a disability, the employer must consider whether the individual could perform these functions with a reasonable accommodation. The ADA doesn’t apply to individuals with minor, non-chronic conditions of short duration, such as a sprain, broken limb, and the like.

The circular provides a VOLUNTARY self-identification form of employees with disabilities. Even if an employee has a disability that is apparent to others, they are under no obligation to participate in this self-identification, and failure to do so will not result in any adverse action. The

circular states that any information an employee chooses to provide will be held in strictest confidence and will be known only to BPS Equity and does not become part of their regular personnel records.

In addition to this policy, if you believe you have been subjected to discrimination or harassment, you may file a complaint with either or both of the following government agencies. Each agency has a short time period for filing a claim (EEOC-180 days can be extended under state/local laws; MCAD 300 days).

\* The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), JFK Federal Building, Room 475, Boston, MA 02203, 1-800-532-5274.

\* The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), Boston Office, One Ashburton Place, Rm 601, Boston, MA 02108, 617-994-6000.

### Is There Coverage for a Special Ed Paraprofessional When They Are Absent?

A newly negotiated Article VII, Section AA details; “Effective during the 2012-13 school year and through August 31, 2016, the School Department shall hire and maintain twenty (20) “coverage paraprofessionals”. The School Department shall deploy these coverage paraprofessionals to cover for 1:1 paraprofessionals and paraprofessionals in substantially separate classrooms who are absent and to supplement current paraprofessional services.”

### How Do BTU Members Who Have a Major Conflict Between Them Receive Mediation?

The BTU has a “BTU to BTU” mediation program where trained BTU mediators have been selected to implement a mediation program with the goal of reaching a mutually agreed upon resolution to said conflict or issue. Mediation in this setting is a voluntary, confidential process which

allows the two BTU members to explore options for resolution of an issue by reaching a mutually agreed upon solution to their issues. Anything said in mediation must be kept confidential and cannot be used in litigation, regardless of the outcome of the mediation. Essentially, “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”

The purpose of this type of mediation is to clarify and explore creative resolutions in a non-judgmental setting. Mediation is not a hearing; rather, the mediator’s goal is to help the participants focus and mutually develop prompt, effective resolutions to issues which meet their needs. If an agreement is met in this process, it is binding which means it will not proceed any further. Mediation is an agreement reaching process in which the mediator assists parties to reach a mutual agreement in a collaborative, consensual informed manner. Any party may terminate the process at any time prior to signing off on a final resolution. In the event the BTU members come to a satisfactory resolution, that agreement once signed will be binding. No info disclosed during the course of the mediation may be disclosed to any BPS administrator without the consent of the party who initially disclosed the info. If there is an agreement, both BTU members will sign a written resolution of the issue.

Sometimes BTU members seek out an administrator to work out issues between other BTU members and the unintended consequences of doing so may be that the administrator takes disciplinary action against one or both BTU members or the perceived inability of the BTU members to work collaboratively with peers is reflected negatively in their formal evaluations. If you are a BTU member who has a significant issue with another BTU member and the both of you are voluntarily willing to participate in this process, email [ccarew@btu.org](mailto:ccarew@btu.org) to do so. Mediation sessions are held after school hours at the BTU. Let’s work together to solve our own problems professionally.

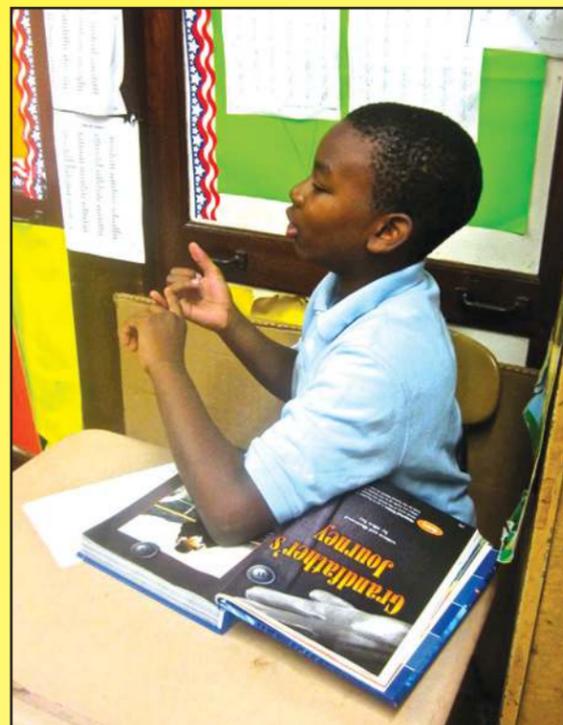
## Channing Elementary School

The Channing Elementary School is tucked away on a quiet residential street in Hyde Park. I was pleasantly surprised by how many of the teachers were African American, as are the majority of students at the school. In the lower grades students were busy with morning meetings, activity centers, literacy and math lessons. Kindergarteners were building with blocks, playing with puppets, and putting jigsaw puzzles together. A second grade class was exploring place value with math manipulatives. While her students worked on their reading assignments, **Flo Charles** gave me a big hug of welcome; she'd taken a class with me many years ago! I love these unexpected connections!

Our current national obsession with test scores and prescribed curriculum has sadly limited creative, interdisciplinary classroom practices, so I am especially delighted to see students engaged in any kind of kinesthetic learning. **Wendy Vitarisi's** first graders showed me how they use aerobics to practice spelling vocabulary words. I also enjoyed watching the music teacher, **Wayne Jones**, work his magic – leading a K1 class in rapping their ABCs with expressive hand/body movements. It was a beautiful fall day and the gym class was held outside, where children did warm-up exercises before practicing throwing and catching a ball.

Third, fourth and fifth graders were taking the Terra Nova exam all morning. Its sole purpose is to select students for AWC classes, regardless of substantial research showing that tracking serves nobody well. I think this is a huge waste of valuable learning time, considering that as many as a third of our students have special needs or are English Language Learners. Luckily, I was able to photograph a few upper elementary students doing something other than filling in circles on an answer sheet. A fourth grader in a substantially separate class for students with learning disabilities was enthusiastically responding to the story they had just read, and I was able to sit in on part of a Japanese lesson in the fifth grade AWC class.

The Channing feels like a calm and happy place, where students are learning something new every day. Fifth grade teacher **Ezi Nwankwo**, originally from Nigeria, mentioned that the entire school comes together monthly for a "Town Hall" meeting where students share what they're learning. Now that's an idea I'd like to see in more of our schools!



I was answering a question from Ms. Gittens about what we were reading, a story called *Grandfather's Journey*. I'm becoming a better reader and writer by learning new vocabulary, how to use synonyms, and lots more.

– Shameek Roc, Grade 4

Amika ☺

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I am doing math with tiles to show tens and ones. I am learning how to take away numbers and do plus numbers.

– Cynya Jackson, Grade 2

We were singing a rap song about the alphabet in Mr. Jones' music class. We are learning to sing and dance. We are also learning the sounds of all the letters with rock and roll music.

– Mrs. Kelly's K1 class

We are finding letters and lining them up in ABC order. We are learning the whole alphabet. We're also learning how to read and write words, and how to count up to 100.

– Priscille Hogu  
Joaldine Francois, &  
Michael Quintanill, K2



I was reading about Cahokia, an ancient city of the Midwest, in my social studies textbook. I've learned that archeologists are scientists who study artifacts to figure out how people lived in the past.

– Ervic Martinez, Grade 4



I was in Japanese class with Nagaoaka Sensei, our teacher. We were looking at maps of Asia and learning where the language came from. Last year I learned how to greet people and introduce myself in Japanese. This year I'm hoping to learn how to write in Japanese.

– Angelina Plunkett, Grade 5

(Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently 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.)