Tritter, community partners, including parents responsibilities will be twofold: helping to now be our full-time BTU organizer. Her teacher from members. This would be a good time to catch up.

There will be a few new personnel changes professional development. I thought I would have little vacation time set aside because and I thought this would be a good time to catch up.

First of all, we have hired two new staff members. Jessica Tang, a social studies teacher from Young Achievers Pilot, will now be our full-time BTU organizer. Her responsibilities will be twofold: helping to better organize our membership, coordinate activities, and shore up our building representative structure; and working to establish a good relationship with all community partners, including parents and students. We have also hired Paul paraprofessional/ substitute teacher field representative. We welcome Josefinas on board as well. Josefinas has been a member of our negotiating team for two cycles and we are fortunate to have her in the office working directly with our members.

Pat Connelly is our vice-president, in charge of all grievances and litigation. A grievance is typically filed at the building level, where it is assisted by the school’s BTU representative and one of our field representatives (Michael McLaughlin/elementary, Careen Carew/secondary, Josefinas Lascano/paraprofessional-substitute teacher). Resolved at the building level, that’s great, and the grievance is settled. If there is no resolution to the grievance, then Patrick takes over and the grievance goes to either mediation or the next step in the grievance process. In either case, Patrick has responsibility from that point until the matter is either litigated or

By Richard Stutman

We hope your summer is going well, even as we know that many of you have little vacation time set aside because of summer school, taking courses and professional development. I thought I would take a little time in this column to describe a bit of who does what in the BTU office. There will be a few personnel changes enacted next year, both with the hiring of additional staff and with the redistribution of certain responsibilities, and I thought this would be a good time to catch up.

First of all, we have hired two new staff members. Jessica Tang, a social studies teacher from Young Achievers Pilot, will now be our full-time BTU organizer. Her responsibilities will be twofold: helping to better organize our membership, coordinate activities, and shore up our building representative structure; and working to establish a good relationship with all community partners, including parents and students. We have also hired Paul paraprofessional/ substitute teacher field representative. We welcome Josefinas on board as well. Josefinas has been a member of our negotiating team for two cycles and we are fortunate to have her in the office working directly with our members.

Let me now break down the responsibilities of each of our full-time staff and tell you what we do.

Patrick Connelly is our vice president, in charge of all grievances and litigation. A grievance is typically filed at the building level, where it is assisted by the school’s BTU representative and one of our field representatives (Michael McLaughlin/elementary, Careen Carew/secondary, Josefinas Lascano/paraprofessional substitute teacher). Resolved at the building level, that is great, and the grievance is settled. If there is no resolution to the grievance, then Patrick takes over and the grievance goes to either mediation or the next step in the grievance process. In either case, Patrick has responsibility from that point until the matter is either litigated or resolved. Patrick has also taken responsibility for the running of our performance evaluation workshops, and he has become our point person in working with teachers who are either in a needs improvement or unsatisfactory situation.

Charles Johnson is the union’s secretary treasurer, the keeper of the records, and the leader of our office’s secretarial staff and operations. Charles also has become our point person on the city’s public employees’ committee, which is responsible for our health insurance coverage. Charles monitors all developments in that area, and reports back to our membership every month at our regularly scheduled meeting.

We have three field representatives, who work primarily in our schools, handling issues at the school level. Careen, Michael, and Josefinas work with our members in arranging school visits and meetings, and spend the better part of their days in our schools working on local issues, helping members navigate through CourtS, understand our benefit package, and providing advice to individual teachers and staff members. In the afternoon, each generally has office hours. But oftentimes things happen unexpectedly taking people out of the office, so it is advisable – before coming over – to set up all appointments through their secretaries. (Careen’s secretaries are Jeannie, Michael’s is Erin, and Josefinas is Patty.)

For better to represent you, we are making a few changes in the structure of the responsibilities of each teacher field rep., so please see the section that follows at all.

Angela Cristiani is our political director and she engages members in political action using a grassroots approach that promotes, educates, and strengthens our organization’s commitment to public education by facilitating members to take an active part in all aspects of the political and legislative process. She works on a host of activities: doing campaign work for pro-public education candidates; testifying at hearings; calling and emailing elected officials; lobbying at the State House for pertinent pieces of legislation; working with the growing rapid response team; and using up-to-date communication tools, like social media.

Jessica Tang will be working this year in trying to enrich the experience for our BTU building representatives as we shore up our communications and our building networking capabilities. We hope to build more capacity among our ranks for activism and Jessica will be building that effort. More than that, Jessica will be meeting with those outside the BTU with whom we have a potential alliance. She brings a wealth of experience to this position and will bring that experience to better organize, both within and outside the union.

Paul Tritter will work with members to establish our priorities for professional learning in Boston. Together, we will create opportunities for members to design, lead, and participate in meaningful professional development that impacts student learning and well-being. We look forward to being part, along with Paul, of the process of encouraging the professional growth of our members and the development of our profession.

Both Paul and Jessica will work out of the BTU office (we’re creating new offices for each) and we are looking forward to their being part of our team.

Brenda Chaney works part-time in the BTU office as a parent and community liaison. Among her responsibilities is the management of our Homework Helper program, which places a teacher or a parent ‘helper’ in each of the 25 libraries in the city each night the library is open. Brenda teaches reading at the O’Bryant and has served the union in a variety of capacities over many years. We are glad to have her on board.

My job as president of this wonderful organization is to quarterback the office and to make sure that all of our members’ needs are taken care of in a timely, efficient and helpful manner. While we each have (continued on page 2)
Introducing the BTU Officers and Staff... (continued from page 1)

different areas of expertise, we all ‘pitch hit’ for each other whenever the need arises. Many of us have particular areas of expertise (retirement, health insurance, performance evaluation, tax-sheltering, school-based management and do one) and we work with each other to get the correct information out to you as quickly as possible and to support you in your office. Our office is open from 8 AM-5 PM, and professional staff are customarily available at the school sites. Our email is available by email (initial then first then last name@btu.org). Our cell phone numbers, too, are listed at btu.org.

Our job is to meet your work-related needs in a hassle-free manner. By that I mean, if you have a problem, we try to resolve it with you and your principal for (BTU) on September 11, 7 PM at 180 Mt. Vernon Street in Dorchester. To date, the event will be hosted by the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and the Boston City Council race, as well. The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, and the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.

But as well as public education, will transition into a new era with an election of a new mayor. There are many candidates in Boston City Council race, as well.

Stay tuned for more information and candidate recommendations.

Because It’s Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director

The corner-stone of our democracy is public education, which serves all the children in the City of Boston.

The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, and the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.

But as well as public education, will transition into a new era with an election of a new mayor. There are many candidates in Boston City Council race, as well.

Stay tuned for more information and candidate recommendations.

Because It’s Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director

The corner-stone of our democracy is public education, which serves all the children in the City of Boston.

The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, and the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.

But as well as public education, will transition into a new era with an election of a new mayor. There are many candidates in Boston City Council race, as well.

Stay tuned for more information and candidate recommendations.

Because It’s Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director

The corner-stone of our democracy is public education, which serves all the children in the City of Boston.

The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, and the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.

But as well as public education, will transition into a new era with an election of a new mayor. There are many candidates in Boston City Council race, as well.

Stay tuned for more information and candidate recommendations.

Because It’s Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director

The corner-stone of our democracy is public education, which serves all the children in the City of Boston.

The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, and the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.
Know Your Rights: Caren Carew, BTU Secondary Field Representative

Is Summer School Treated Like the Regular School Year Contractually?

No, it is not. Summer school is not governed by the collective bargaining agreement in the same way the standard school year is. Some time ago the BTU took the issue of the summer school as a bargaining item against the State. The State subsequently took the issue to court to have the earned income be retirement income. Employee participation in the summer program is voluntary. Selection of employees shall be as determined by the [school Department].

Do teachers receive PDP's for the 18 after school hours and the one full day of BPS professional development?

Yes, the BTU contract reads, "Teachers will receive a PDP certificate at the end of the regular school year. All time spent in professional development activities. Teachers may combine PDP activities year-to-year to comply with state requirements." This PDP, if earned, must be awarded to each eligible teacher retroactive to the 2003-04 school year. No written or other documented product need be submitted in order to obtain them. Since the BPS is your school is the provider of this professional development, it meets the recertification regulations of aligning with school and/or district professional development goals as well as your supervisor’s approval.

Within the five year recertification cycle, teachers may combine PDP credits having the same broad topic together to meet the Mass. Department of Education’s threshold of earning a minimum of 10 PDP’s in a topic to qualify for submission. Teachers earn one PDP per clock hour for professional development activities. In order to be able to claim PDP’s in a specific content area or topic if they are awarded with a general certificate, keep a copy of the agenda / description of the professional development activity on file in order to then be able to align them with other PDP’s within the same topic, earned within the five year recertification cycle. Teachers and Writers Workshop of Boston across the curriculum’s PDP’s can now be applied to content area requirements if the writing/literacy application is being used in the content of a specific content class. In order to receive their professional license, teachers must have completed 150 PDP’s (Professional Development Points) with at least 90 of them in the license content area and a minimum of 120 (including 90 in the content area) been in combined content and pedagogy. The remainder of the PDP’s can be in any educational topic. Go forth and collect your certificates.

How does a person with disabilities apply for reasonable accommodations at work?

The IEPS policy Superintendent’s Circular EQT-3, Employees with Disabilities – Rights & Responsibilities, provides that the BPS shall provide or pay for reasonable accommodations for those persons with disabilities to education programs and employment practices in accordance with 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 an impairment, most of which require legal interpretations. Examples of the range of disabilities include:

- Ambulatory disabilities - physical impairments requiring use of a wheelchair;  
- Ambulatory disabilities – physical impairments causing a person to walk with a cane, crutches, or a wheelchair.
- Coordination impairments – impairments of muscle control to limbs, resulting in faulty coordination;  
- Sight impairments; 
- Hearing impairments.
- Schizophrenia;  
- Mental or psychological disorders – impairments affecting 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 without reasonable accommodation. If the employee cannot perform the “essential functions” of the job with or without reasonable accommodation, the employer must consider whether the individual could perform these functions with or without reasonable accommodation. The ADA applies 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 does not constitute a bar to the employee’s approval. The ADA does not apply to individuals with minor, non-chronic conditions of short duration, such as a sprain, broken limb, and the like.

If a teacher is unable to perform the “essential function” of a position, the ADA requires a paraprofessional to be assigned to the position. A paraprofessional 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 an impairment, most of which require legal interpretations. Examples of the range of disabilities include:

- Ambulatory disabilities – physical impairments requiring use of a wheelchair;  
- Ambulatory disabilities – physical impairments causing a person to walk with a cane, crutches, or a wheelchair.
- Coordination impairments – impairments of muscle control to limbs, resulting in faulty coordination;  
- Sight impairments; 
- Hearing impairments.
- Schizophrenia;  
- Mental or psychological disorders – impairments affecting normal mental processes or emotional stability.

As a teacher am I entitled to receive my student’s standardized testing results?

Yes. The contract reads: “Beginning in September 1997, and in each subsequent June, all classroom teachers shall be provided with the following data indicating how their students compare on standardized achievement tests with similar students in similar classrooms throughout the school system, including relative gain data where possible.”

It continues by stating: "When the state-wide assessment tests begin in the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades in English, math, history, and science, comparative data on these tests will also be provided to teachers. Also, when the BPS develops criterion reference tests or other district wide performance assessments, teachers will also be provided with comparative data. Where possible, this data will be provided on a pupil gain basis.”

Of course there is always the other side to the coin in a labor management collective bargaining agreement, better known as the contract when it elaborates; “Where students progress is consistently low, principals and administrators or their designees will discuss personally, these test results with each of their teachers and work with these teachers to develop appropriate strategies for improving student performance." Make sure if your administrator points out this type of data to you that you also assist collaboratively in supporting you in your efforts to maximize the students’ potential going forward. Document, document, document.

The collective bargaining agreement also reads that: “In the latter case, one would be hard pressed to find a Home Economics teacher in the BPS in order to substitute for.

What is the substitute class coverage policy when I’m out?

(1) The paraprofessional has a teaching certificate. (2) The paraprofessional is requested to serve as a substitute teacher under the following conditions:

- The paraprofessional must be available to substitute in those classes in which he or she normally works. 
- The paraprofessional is to be paid $10.00 per hour in addition to his or her regular salary.” This is not a list of either or. All three conditions must be met in order for a paraprofessional to be utilized as a substitute in their own class only. If these conditions have been met, the Para should check with the school secretary and administrator in charge of coverage to make sure the additional pay has been submitted to the BPS Payroll Department for their substitute work.

The contract continues: "The [School] Department will make a good faith effort to hire a substitute when a regularly assigned nurse is absent for more than one day. In any event, a substitute will be provided whenever a nurse is absent for three or more days.” When a qualified Vocational Education substitute is not available the shop is to be closed. “When a qualified Industrial Arts or Home Economics teacher is not available, the shop is to be closed.” In the latter case, one would be hard pressed to find a Home Economics teacher in the BPS in order to substitute for.

The Boston Union Teacher is published eleven times a year. September - July, inclusive.

President
RICHARD F. STUTMAN

Vice President
PATRICK CONNOLLY

Secretary-Treasurer
CHARLES R. JOHNSON

Co-Editors
MICHAEL J. MAGUIRE  
GABRIEL SCHUCHEL

Editorial Board
Caren Carew  
Angela Cristiani  
Michael McAuliff  
Eileen Weir

On the Cover:

The Boston Union Teacher is published ten times a year in September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May, and June.

EDITORIAL NOTE: The opinions expressed in the Boston Union Teacher do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Union Teachers Union, or any of its members.

WHEN WRITING to the Boston Union Teacher, members must be sure to include the author’s name and school or department if not school-based.

Articles must be appropriate to the publication, and in good taste.

Letters to the Editor should be sent to letters@btu.org

DEADLINE: The deadline for submitting articles for the September issue is August 18th.

All copy must be e-mailed to: btu@btu.org

This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

Published by the Boston Teachers Union AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

Phone Numbers

Health & Welfare: 617-288-0900  
AFT Massachusetts: 617-423-1342  
Function Office: 617-288-5122  
Lounger Office: 617-288-2950  
Vision Center: 617-288-5450  
Tremont Credit Union: 781-813-5626

The Boston Union Teacher is published ten times a year in September, July, inclusive.

President
RICHARD F. STUTMAN

Vice President
PATRICK CONNOLLY

Secretary-Treasurer
CHARLES R. JOHNSON

Co-Editors
MICHAEL J. MAGUIRE  
GABRIEL SCHUCHEL

Editorial Board
Caren Carew  
Angela Cristiani  
Michael McAuliff  
Eileen Weir

WHO IS THE UNION?

The Boston Teachers Union, founded in 1887, is the exclusive bargaining agent for all regular school year employees of the Boston Public Schools. As an AFT local, the BTU is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, which is itself a member of the AFL-CIO. The BTU is a member of the Boston Area Federation of Teachers (BAFT), which represents all regular school year employees of the Boston Public Schools and provides a common voice to negotiate and advocate for teachers in both the district and the State.

Through the collective bargaining agreement, the teachers of the Boston Public Schools maintain a voice in the decision-making process of the district. In addition, the BTU negotiating committee has the mandate to negotiate a better contract for its members each year.

The Boston Teachers Union is a voice for teachers in every school and every classroom. The BTU fights for the best teachers and the best education for every student. Together we can! The BTU is committed to the following principles:

• Equity: Ensuring that all students receive an education of high quality.
• Research: Ensuring that teaching is based on what we know about learning and education.
• Professional Development: Ensuring that teachers have the tools they need to perform their jobs.
• Shared Decision-Making: Ensuring that teachers are involved in the decisions that affect their work and their students.

The Boston Teachers Union is proud to be the exclusive bargaining agent for Boston teachers. The BTU represents the teachers of the Boston Public Schools.

The Boston Teachers Union represents the teachers of the Boston Public Schools. The BTU is committed to the following principles:

• Equity: Ensuring that all students receive an education of high quality.
• Research: Ensuring that teaching is based on what we know about learning and education.
• Professional Development: Ensuring that teachers have the tools they need to perform their jobs.
• Shared Decision-Making: Ensuring that teachers are involved in the decisions that affect their work and their students.

The Boston Teachers Union is proud to be the exclusive bargaining agent for Boston teachers. The BTU represents the teachers of the Boston Public Schools.
From the opening remarks to the closing luncheon, the unity of theme was mighty and omnipresent. AFT president Randi Weingarten’s remarks on “Reclaiming the Promise” are printed on page 6. Other speakers from US Representative John Lewis (D-GA) to actor Tony Danza carried the reclamation theme in their remarks. Workshops also pushed home the message. My two favorites were “Engaging the Community and Building Support for a School Improvement Agenda” and “Showing Your Work: Using Social Media for Professional Learning and Advocacy.” To learn more about the conference, go to aft.org/teach2013.

Amid all the hopeful optimism lay an uncomfortable aspect of public education: others have high jacked education from the teachers and students. For one can only reclaim what was lost or stolen. Thankfully, instead of finger pointing and blaming, the conference was a rallying cry and a call to action. Whatever the past, the road ahead is our focus.

Here in Boston we have a chance to reclaim public education. With the election of a new mayor, we can shine a light on what our educational dollars purchase and on how educational policies impact all of Boston’s students. Let’s take charter schools as a key example.

Twenty years ago charter schools were introduced into Massachusetts. Charters were supposed to be laboratories of educational experimentation. Successful experiments were to be replicated statewide. That was the promise.

How can twenty years go by and not one “success” be replicated statewide? In keeping with the TEACH theme, the promise has gone off track. We need to reclaim education. In this case we need to remind the public what the original promise was and expose what has happened since.

The sad reality is that charter schools have become entities unto themselves. They are investments for hedge fund managers seeking a tax shelter. They are a separate and not-so-equal educational system. Their popularity among parents is also a sign that the Boston School Committee is not addressing their needs.

The BTU is working hard to reclaim public education. Richard Stutman’s column in this paper explains how all the union staff and officers work together on our behalf. Moreover, Jessica Tang and Paul Tritter (both newly-hired) will add to our efforts to reclaim the promise of quality public education for all of Boston’s students.

In the coming school year there will be much work to do. Together, we can fulfill the mission of this summer’s conference.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy)
Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education

by Randi Weingarten, AFT National President

As excerpt from her opening remarks at AFT TEACH 13

E

even with more members than ever before, even being solution-driven, it's not enough. But by uniting our voices, particularly in concert with parents and community, we can't be ignored.

We need to do that, brothers and sisters, because we are at a crucial moment when public education is about fighting for neighborhood places for teaching and learning. Reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that teachers are well-prepared, are supported and have time to collaborate. Reckoning the promise is about enabling them to teach an engaging curriculum that includes art and music and the sciences. And reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that kids have access to wraparound services to meet their emotional, social and health needs.

Taken together, all these things reflect our prescription for ensuring that all kids have the opportunities they need and deserve. This vision may look different community by community. But it has a few common elements. Reclaiming the promise will bring back the joy of teaching and learning. It's the way to make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, teachers want to teach and students want to learn. It's the way to make our public schools the center of the community and fulfills its purpose as an engine of our democracy and a propeller of our economy.

This is not a campaign. This is our core. And it must be the focus of our work going forward. Ours is a vision that can stop the privatizers, profit-seekers and austerity hawks in their tracks.

But they're not going to roll over and go away. We need your help. None of us can be bystanders. We need to reach out to parents, the community and civic leaders.

We need to open our schools—inviting parents, neighbors, civic, business and community leaders to see what we do, to see what our kids need. It simply makes sense to bring together people with shared priorities and concerns in this place we care about so much, the public schools where our children are nurtured and educated.

And to do this, we need to open our schools to parents, to neighbors, civic, business and community leaders. We need to open our schools to parents, the community and civic leaders.

The last one listed, Badass Teachers Association (https://www.facebook.com/groups/BadAssTeachers/), was started this past summer. In just a few weeks over 25,000 individuals have signed on to the group. The founders were Friscia Sanstead, Dr. Mark Naison, and Marla Killion. Every Monday the group has an action that often involves letter writing, phone calls, and direct actions. Its teachers standing up against the abuse that too often comes our way.

Reclaiming the promise is about enabling them to teach an engaging curriculum that includes art and music and the sciences. And reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that kids have access to wraparound services to meet their emotional, social and health needs.

Taken together, all these things reflect our prescription for ensuring that all kids have the opportunities they need and deserve. This vision may look different community by community. But it has a few common elements. Reclaiming the promise will bring back the joy of teaching and learning. It's the way to make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, teachers want to teach and students want to learn. It's the way to make our public schools the center of the community and fulfills its purpose as an engine of our democracy and a propeller of our economy.

This is not a campaign. This is our core. And it must be the focus of our work going forward. Ours is a vision that can stop the privatizers, profit-seekers and austerity hawks in their tracks.

But they're not going to roll over and go away. We need your help. None of us can be bystanders. We need to reach out to parents, the community and civic leaders.

We need to open our schools to parents, to neighbors, civic, business and community leaders. We need to open our schools to parents, the community and civic leaders.

The last one listed, Badass Teachers Association (https://www.facebook.com/groups/BadAssTeachers/), was started this past summer. In just a few weeks over 25,000 individuals have signed on to the group. The founders were Friscia Sanstead, Dr. Mark Naison, and Marla Killion. Every Monday the group has an action that often involves letter writing, phone calls, and direct actions. Its teachers standing up against the abuse that too often comes our way.
Creating a Culture of Continuous Professional Learning

By Paul Tritter, BTU Director of Professional Development

How can the Boston Teachers Union and the Boston Public Schools work together to create a culture of continuous professional learning that has meaningful impact on our students’ learning and well-being?

We begin a new school year with an exciting question. As you may know, our contract has established a new initiative, housed at the BTU, dedicated to professional development. The BTU Professional Leadership Institute (previously known as the Professional Development Institute) is our chance to imagine new ways that we can develop our practices to serve our students. I am honored and excited to serve as the first director of this effort.

At the outset, my goals are first to learn as much as possible about what is already working, and second to set a course for our future efforts. I am asking for your help with these related missions.

As with any new endeavor, we must begin by working together to develop and articulate the mission of this new project. We need as many voices as possible. We need to hear the ideas of paraprofessionals, nurses, guidance counselors, community field coordinators, speech and language pathologists, and every other professional in our union.

We need to hear from early-career teachers just as much as we do from those who have been in the classroom for years. We need a diversity of voices from a range of grade-levels and a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We need the burned-out voices and the new voices. We need the voices of those who have made mistakes, and the voices of those who have learned from the experiences of others.

What is the work you and your colleagues are doing to make your school great? I am here to support you in that work and to help you share it with others.

Paul Tritter

UPCOMING BTU EVENTS—OUR VOICE IS YOUR VOICE:

Summer Open Houses:
New BTU Staff want to hear from you!

Are you staying around Boston this summer? The BTU would love to see you! If you are available, the new BTU staff members Paul Tritter (ptritter@btu.org) and Jessica Tang (jtang@btu.org) would love to meet you. Paul will be leading the new BTU Professional Leadership Institute, and Jessica is working on activating and organizing our membership as well as strengthening community relationships. Come drop by one of our summer open houses to learn more about their work and the new initiatives. I will be looking for opportunities to lend your thoughts to this critical process.

Even as we take the time to develop our mission, our members are already engaged in successful professional learning projects all across the district and beyond. I want to learn more about these projects and share that work. I am eager to learn about what is working, and I want to get to work on it in your school to make it work in action.

Is your school implementing a new curriculum? Do you have an innovative approach to the classroom? Are you working together to create meaningful family and community partnerships? Are you finding new ways to use technology to create more authentic, connected student learning experiences? Do your schools have a unique way of promoting student health and wellness? Have you tested out new ways of designing and interacting with the physical space in your school building and hallways? Are you experimenting with new teamwork structures or collaborative planning? Are you trying out project-based or interdisciplinary learning?

Communication will be at the core of these efforts. Though I promise to work hard to learn about as many wonderful projects and new ideas as possible, I need to hear from you.

I will create opportunities for you to get involved and share your voice, but don’t hesitate to reach out to me at ptritter@btu.org to let me know what’s going on. I look forward to joining with you to realize each of our members’ potential for professional growth and the collective growth of our profession.

“ME” vs. “WE” Improving our schools through and community engagement

By Jessica Tang, BTU Director of Community Engagement

When I first started teaching, I had to admit, I was a bit self-centered. Everything was all about me. I felt like I was the one responsible for teaching my students to tutor students and stayed late into the evening to plan lessons. I sacrificed my family and personal lives to focus on my own ego-centricty, when my 3rd or 4th year of teaching, I was in the middle of another “but...” statement and cut off by a full-fat inner-ego.

It was a hurtful, rude awakening. In hindsight, I can admit it was deserved and eventually enlightening, but picking my wounds days later. I reflected on the statement and dug deep to unpack what I could learn from the experience. The first hurdle, learning how to care for the prickly, still that still resonates deeply with me. Over the years I have really begun to understand how true the statement is—public education is all about people and not just me. Educating students, defending public education, making schools better is not all about "the me" but "we" together and everyone is involved.

Ultimately, there is a culture and narrative pervasive in education reform right now where we are waiting for “supermen” and “superwomen” to come and save us. Poor, inner-city public school students. There is a focus on individualism, merit, rewards, and competition and the framing is about who privates are, who public schools are. The same simplified story line, all traditional public schools have become “bad schools” and all charters have become “the better choice.” Educators are either “good” or “bad” and either should be promoted or fired. Competition and corporate practices have become the go to solution, disregarding the problematic nature of applying what is learned to know better. There are successful public schools. Given the right leadership and resources, schools do have better teaching and learning for everyone and of course those who cannot teach. should not. However, what's missing from this narrative is the vast majority of educators who are working hard every day to do better despite lack of supports and in spite of difficult teaching conditions. There are those who are driven by and beyond and get the recognition they deserve, but for every educator recognized, there are many more going above and beyond in ways that may not be recognized without the recognition. Thus, whenever a few of us go get to shine in the limelight, it should be about the “we” not only the “me.” In order to advance our profession and strengthen our collective voice to improve schools, we need to begin thinking and acting more collaboratively.

This means engaging with our union and just as importantly, the larger community of parents, students and community members that live in Boston’s neighborhood schools. It’s rare to discuss the future of our students, too. Working in our own silos may impact the students before us, but if we are truly to make an impact on a larger scale, we need to bring these conversations and experiences that we know will help us to meet the needs of our students—the collective action, collective voice, and collective accountability. The community of educators, students, parents, and community members is necessary. Those of us who are on the ground living, working, and interacting in the schools and neighborhoods of Boston hold the answers to improving schools and must be heard. To be heard, we must take action.

These are the fundamental beliefs that motivate me to do what I do. I am grateful to have the opportunity to help our union in this work as I take a leave of absence from teaching to serve as the Director of Community Engagement. However, I cannot do this work alone! Organizing in schools and the community must always be a “we” not “me” endeavor and we, members of the BTU, are the ones doing this work.

Here are a few new initiatives (there will be many more) that we hope you will commit to participating in some time in the next few months (please see the sidebar for specific dates and times):

• Summer Open Houses to express your thoughts about professional development and membership and community engagement
• Prospective Building Rep Info Sessions and meetings for Building Rep
• Attending the upcoming BTU Mayoral Forum on September 11, 7 pm
• Attending monthly membership meetings the second Wednesday of every month at the BTU and/or regional membership meetings this year.

You don’t have to engage in a more formal way, there are many things all of us can do to make an impact. Please consider:

• Telling your stories as BTU members and sharing information about what BPS schools really need (and don’t need) with friends and families
• Staying informed as much as possible by reading the BTE (sig up at www.btu.org) and taking the time to read all communications from the BTU
• Looking out for more opportunities and actions throughout the year

Across the nation, public education has been losing the battle against the corporate education reformers, from Chicago to Detroit to Philly. In the City of Boston, we have reached a crossroads. We may follow one path or another. As union members, our duty is to organize our members, our community allies, and potential allies, we may be able to start the stamp of corporate reforms and promote a new path that values the voices of those who know our schools best and actually invests in the changes we know will actually make a difference for ALL of our students.

BOSTON UNION TEACHER July-August, 2013 ▼ 7
One of the greatest pleasures of retirement is the opportunity to travel during the school year, and I recently returned from an extended trip to Australia and New Zealand. For two weeks at the end of October we exchanged homes with Shirley Steel, a retired educator. When I told her I’d love to visit a school, she recommended Whalan, where she had served as principal for several years. The school year runs from January to December, so I was visiting in the middle of the final term.

Whalan Primary School serves 350-400 students, Preschool to Grade 6, in a large government housing area with high unemployment. Approximately 20% of the students are of Aboriginal heritage and 40% speak a language other than English at home; most walk to school. There’s a photo of each teacher at the school’s entrance, and photo signs at doorways saying, “Welcome! Our teacher’s name is...” I felt right at home in classrooms full of books and posters and student work, with word walls and reminders of the school’s three rules displayed everywhere: “Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be a Learner.”

Principal Jo-Ann Lock gave me a lovely tour of the sprawling complex of classroom buildings. They have an extensive kitchen garden where students in grades 3-6 grow, harvest and learn to prepare different foods! It was Friday afternoon and most students were in the fields, playing sports, and eating lunch. One group of students was working on artwork for an end-of-year “Celebrations” theme. I enjoyed being involved with an “Ocean” theme at the Manning Elementary School, where I taught for many years and my 4th grade students did cross-grade research projects with first graders. If any of you have had positive experiences with school-wide themes, please share them via the BTU Union Paper... articles always welcome. We can inspire one another!

Each teacher at Whalan Primary School is responsible for six subjects (plus supervising lunch/recess time): Maths, English, Social Sciences, Science, Arts, and Physical Education. There are no “specialist” teachers and they get only a half hour break all day long, although they do have a weekly 2-hour block of release time for conferences, phone calls, grading papers, etc. This year’s academic focus is on reading and the entire staff read The Book Whisperer, about how to encourage a love of reading; perhaps some of you are familiar with it.

I enjoyed visiting Whalan and getting a glimpse into a school world both similar to and different from our own. As in the USA, Australian educators are concerned with budget cuts and a new national curriculum. What sustains us all is “the kids” – working to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Note: This column ran on the BTU website in February. The summer felt like the best time to include it in the Boston Union Teacher.