

# Boston Union Teachers



The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union

AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO • Democracy in Education • Volume XLV, Number 11 • July-August, 2013

## Introducing the BTU Officers and Staff

By Richard Stutman  
BTU President

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 new 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 Josefina on board as well. Josefina 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 Connolly** 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, **Caren Carew**/secondary, **Josefina Lascano**/paraprofessional-substitute teacher). If 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

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. **Caren**, **Michael**, and **Josefina** 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 Court St., 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. (Caren's sec-



Richard Stutman  
BTU President

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 out building-networking capabilities. We hope to build more capacity among our ranks for activism and Jessica will be heading 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 now 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 para '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

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### New Officers and Staff Ready to Serve You!



New Paraprofessional/Substitute Field Rep. Josefina Lascano, New Director of Organizing Jessica Tang and New Director of Professional Development Paul Tritter and already hard at work to help serve you – the membership of the Boston Teachers Union.

**Tritter**, an ELA teacher from *Snowden HS* to be director of our new BTU Professional Learning Initiative. We are excited about the possibilities of our being able, under Paul's leadership to nurture the growth of PD and leadership opportunities for our members. We're happy to bring both Jessica and Paul on board to work with our leadership to improve our schools and to enhance teaching and learning opportunities for all.

The rest of the office staff remains the same, except that **Josefina Lascano** has replaced **Jenna Fitzgerald** as our

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 manager 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

retary is **Jeannie**, Michael's is **Erin**, and Josefina's is **Patty**.)

(N.B. To better 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 end.)

**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

# Preparation and Expectations

**Patrick J. Connolly**  
Executive Vice President

As summer speeds by, the newspapers and other media call our attention to back to school sales. We begin to prepare our own children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews for the upcoming school year. Teachers and paraprofessionals prepare to welcome a new group of students whose parents and guardians have entrusted them to us, to help them learn, grow and be kept safe. For new teachers and veteran teachers this is a great responsibility, one which we welcome and to which we have committed our careers.

This September we begin the school year with a contract in place and settled for the next several years. The BTU welcomes the additional nurses who were hired last year and begin their first full year of service in the BPS. Likewise the BTU welcomes the additional Social Workers who are to be hired for the start of the 2013 – 2014 school year. The services they will provide are sorely needed by our students we teach. Our students face many issues outside the classroom and this is one step in helping teachers, students, and families to manage these issues.

The contract has not settled all outstanding issues. The BPS and the BTU do not exist in a closed universe. Both are influenced and impacted by events and happenings outside our control. One example is the requirement for content area teachers to obtain an SEI Endorsement in order to obtain, advance, or renew their educator's license. While many completed the category training in past years, there are new requirements now. With many teachers needing to recertify in 2014, special attention needs to be paid to the requirements and timelines being developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Likewise the economic issues facing other cities cannot be ignored. School closings in Philadelphia and Chicago and elsewhere resound in Boston with demands for fiscal accountability. The economic crisis faced by Detroit is a reminder that promises of future pensions may not be a guarantee. The rising cost of health care is an issue that faces all municipalities and states. The BPS and the BTU need to address these issues together.

For example as schools are assigned

to Level 3 or Level 4 by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education there are some additional resources. Also in Grade 6 in these schools the class size maxima will be reduced from 28 students to 26 students. At schools designated Level 3 or 4 the Grade 9 maxima will be 30 students. For more detailed information refer to page 24 in the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The school year 2013–2014 also brings us into the second year of a new evaluation system (for the original Turnaround Schools it will be the third year). Both educators and evaluators had to learn and work with a new system. There were successes and failures. Some issues were raised regarding the timing of the system. Some issues were related to observations, feedback, and the gathering of evidence. The new EDFS system was an undertaking for both. Not all issues have yet been resolved to the satisfaction of either or both parties.

Educators will begin again to enter goals and action steps. They should be tied to the school goals. The evaluator should then approve the goals. Hopefully this process will move along more smoothly and more timely with a year's experience. All educators should refer to the Collective Bargaining Agreement to inform themselves of the process and procedures.

There are and will still be disputes regarding the evaluation process. Grievances need to be filed when violations occur. There have been educators dismissed based on the new evaluation system. The BTU is contesting some of these dismissals at arbitration. To date there has not been a case that has proceeded to a final decision by an arbitrator.

As of July, 2013 there are approximately 340 educators who have received a rating of less than Proficient. About 60 of these educators were rated "Unsatisfactory". These educators may start the year with a plan of much shorter duration than those on a self-directed plan. If you are in one of these categories, contact the BTU Of-



**Patrick J. Connolly**  
BTU Executive  
Vice President

fice to discuss your situation. There are resources available to assist teachers with evaluation issues, take advantage of them.

During the 2013 – 2014 school year there will be further work done to meet DESE requirements. Work on district developed measures to go along with MCAS scores is being required. Likewise an educator's impact on student learning will become part of an educator's evaluation in a couple of years. The process is ongoing and evolving. The response of the BTU to these issues is likewise ongoing and

evolving. A close analysis of factors such as race and age will be done to ensure that our members are being evaluated in a fair and equitable manner.

As the school year begins, it is important to have high expectations for yourself, your students, and your school. The key to success is in the preparation for each and every class. I wish the BPS and all BTU members a very successful school year. If there are questions or concerns with which I can assist, please contact me at [pconnolly@btu.org](mailto:pconnolly@btu.org).

## Because It's Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director BTU to Host Mayoral Candidate Forum

Mark your calendars! A Mayoral Candidate Forum will be hosted by the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) on September 11, 7 PM at 180 Mt. Vernon Street in Dorchester. To date, the BTU has not made an endorsement in the Mayoral race.

The Forum will be moderated by **David Bernstein**, a leading Massachusetts political analyst and journalist.

Specifics regarding the BTU Mayoral Forum will be forthcoming.

The Preliminary Municipal Election in Boston is on Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>.

The Mayoral candidates, in ballot order, for the Municipal Primary are as follows: **Charles L. Clemons, Bill Walczak, Charles Calvin Yancey, Rob Consalvo, Charlotte Golar Richie, Michael P. Ross, Martin J. Walsh, John R. Connolly, Felix G. Arroyo, David James Wyatt, Daniel F. Conley, and John F. Barros.**

The cornerstone of our democracy is public education, which serves all the children in the City of Boston schools. The BTU remains dedicated to students, families, the community, and ensuring that each child receives a well-rounded, quality education from teachers who are credentialed and highly-qualified.

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

Stay tuned for more information and candidate recommendations!



**Angela Cristiani**

## Commentary: Garret Virchick Summer Reading: My Favorite Blogs

The current HBO hit series The Newsroom reminds us there once was a time when facts rather than gossip and bias were the guiding light for news media.

But the bias that is all to prevalent in the corporate controlled media has forced many of us to get our

information from non-traditional sources.

One of my favorite blogs that gives the honest truth about what is happening in the world of public education is written by **Diane Ravitch**: <http://dianeravitch.net/>. Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a historian of education. From 1991-1993 she was Assistant Secretary of Education and Counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander during the presidency of George H.W. Bush. She also was appointed by the Clinton administration Secretary of Education Richard Riley to serve on the National Assessment Governing Board.

Much of her work during this time centered around reforming and improving public education. When she saw that this effort was being hijacked by anti-teacher, anti-union forces she wrote a book called The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education (2010) and has become a leader in the movement to reclaim public education from those that would privatize and profit from it.

Her daily blog posts are filled with the facts and insight that have been accumulated during a lifetime of academic achievement. Her years of public service has given her insight into the power

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**Garret Virchick**

## Introducing the BTU Officers and Staff...

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different areas of expertise, we all 'pinch 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 with any call to the office. Our office is open from 8 AM-5 PM, and professional staff are customarily available at the office from 8 AM to 7 PM. Each of us is available by email (first initial then last name@btu.org). Our cell phone numbers, too, are listed at [btu.org](http://btu.org).

Our business 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 (or Human resources, Payroll or the like) in the shortest, most efficient and painless manner. Sometimes we succeed quickly, sometimes we try to reach a fair compromise, and rarely do we have to litigate. Above all, we try to find the best way to move the situation forward.

We are by no means perfect, and we looking for ways to improve. We want to help you, we want our schools to improve, and we want to be more relevant

to your needs. So help us help you. Become involved. Please feel free to email me at [rstutman@btu.org](mailto:rstutman@btu.org) if you have any questions.

★★★★★

(Through the end of the last school year, teacher field representative duties were assigned to grades, not necessarily schools. So Caren worked with teachers in secondary grades and Michael worked with teachers in elementary grades. There has always been a bit of overlap (both field reps assigned to the same school), but it was manageable. But with the tremendous growth in K-8 schools in the recent past few years both Caren and Michael each had responsibility last year for portions of 26 K-8 schools, even if some of the schools had very few teachers in a particular grade. The overlap/duplication of services was very inefficient. With the proposed addition of four new K-8 schools coming online over the next few years, matters will only get worse. It was decided therefore to divide up all K-8 schools so that Michael and Caren would each take a smaller number of *entire* schools as opposed to being responsible for select grades in *all* k-8's. This ought to improve efficiency. The breakdown of which k-8s will be Michael's responsibility, and

which will be Caren's will be announced in an upcoming e-bulletin.

Josefina, who represents all paras and substitute teachers in each school, will continue to travel to all 128 schools as needed.

We have also decided to juggle administratively which field representative has responsibility for which itinerant group with cross-school assignments. Currently, there are a number of groups of varying sizes, e.g., OT, PT, COSESS, School Psychologist, Pupil Adjustment Counselor, Vision, Adaptive Physical Ed, Speech and Language, Supervisors of Attendance, and Nurses. Through this past June each field representative had responsibility for some or all of *each* group. That, too, was inefficient. Beginning in September, we will assign whole groups to individual field representatives. This, too, will be announced via e-bulletin. It is our hope that both of these changes will allow for a more efficient delivery of services to our members. All of this will take a little getting used to, but we are going to try it out for a year, as it will cut down by 13 schools or so each field rep.'s responsibility. This will make service for all members more efficient.)

# Is Summer School Treated Like the Regular School Year Contractually?



**Caren Carew**

No, it is not. Summer school is not governed by the collective bargaining agreement in the same way the standard school year is. Sometime ago the BTU took the issue of summer school salary not being retirement worthy to court to demand that this earned income be retirement worthy. Unfortunately, the court ruled against the case. The BTU/BPS contract reports, "The School Department shall determine the summer program curriculum, all aspects of operation and administration of the program, including employment in the program, salary, hours, and conditions of employment. Employee participation in the summer program shall be 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 school year for all time spent in professional development activities. Teachers may combine PDP activities year-to-year to comply with state requirements." These PDP's, if earned, must be awarded to each eligible teacher retroactive to the 2003-04 school year. No written or other documentable product need be submitted in order to obtain them. Since the BPS/your school is the provider of this professional development, it meets the recertification regulations of aligning 'with school and/or district improvement goals' as well as your supervisor's approval.

Within the five year recertification cycle, teachers are able to bunch PDP's 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 session/workshop completed in order to then be able to align them with other PDP's within the same topic, earned within the five year recertification cycle. Readers and Writers Workshop or literacy across the curriculum PDP's can now be applied to content area requirements if the writing/literacy application is being used in the context of a specific content class. In order to recertify 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) being 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 BPS policy Superintendent's Circular EQT-1, 'Employees with Disabilities - Rights & Responsibilities', commits to non-discrimination against qualified persons with disabilities to education programs 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 02203. 1-800-532-5274. \* The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD); Boston Office; One Ashburton Place, Rm 601, Boston 02108, 617-994-6000.

## What's the substitute class coverage policy when I'm out?

The BTU Collective Bargaining Agreement [contract] outlines: "It is the policy of the [School] Committee that substitutes shall be hired to cover classes of regularly assigned teachers when they are absent."

"In the event that the Committee after a good faith effort is unable to hire a substitute for a classroom teacher who regularly works with a paraprofessional, that paraprofes-

sional may be requested to serve as a substitute teacher under the following conditions: (1) The paraprofessional has a teaching certificate or ten or more years of service. (2) The paraprofessional is requested to substitute only in those classes in which he or she normally works. (3) The paraprofessional is paid \$6.00 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.

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

Yes. The contract details; "Beginning in September 1997, and in each subsequent June, all classroom teachers shall be provided by the BPS with 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 statewide assessment tests begin in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>,

and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 know 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 they also assist collaboratively in supporting you in your efforts to maximize the students' potential going forward. Document, document, document.

The collective bargaining agreement also reminds us that, "Each school's Whole School Improvement Plan shall include guidelines for assessing & improving the annual academic progress of all students." Each school's School Site Council and ILT have a hand in creating and approving the WSIP. All members of the school community are to be included in this process and to be provided with a copy of said plan to familiarize themselves with the goals and action plan for achieving same in the coming school year. Each goal has designated those members by category that will be responsible for carrying out these goals. Make sure that these responsibilities are shared evenly and are not all loaded on the teaching staff alone. It takes a village to raise and educate a child. Together we can!

## SEE BTU UPCOMING EVENTS ON PAGE 7

# Boston Union Teacher

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

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

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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)

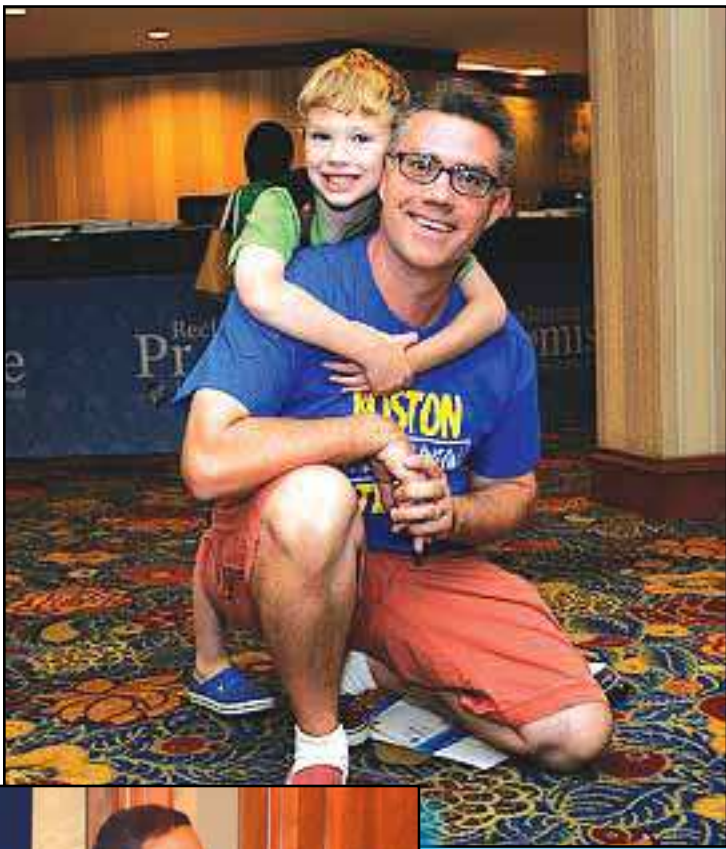
### DEADLINE:

The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is August 18th.

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.

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# The 2013 American Federation of Teachers' Biennial TEACH Conference Was Held in Washington, D.C.

This year's theme was "Reclaiming the Promise: Uniting for 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](http://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.

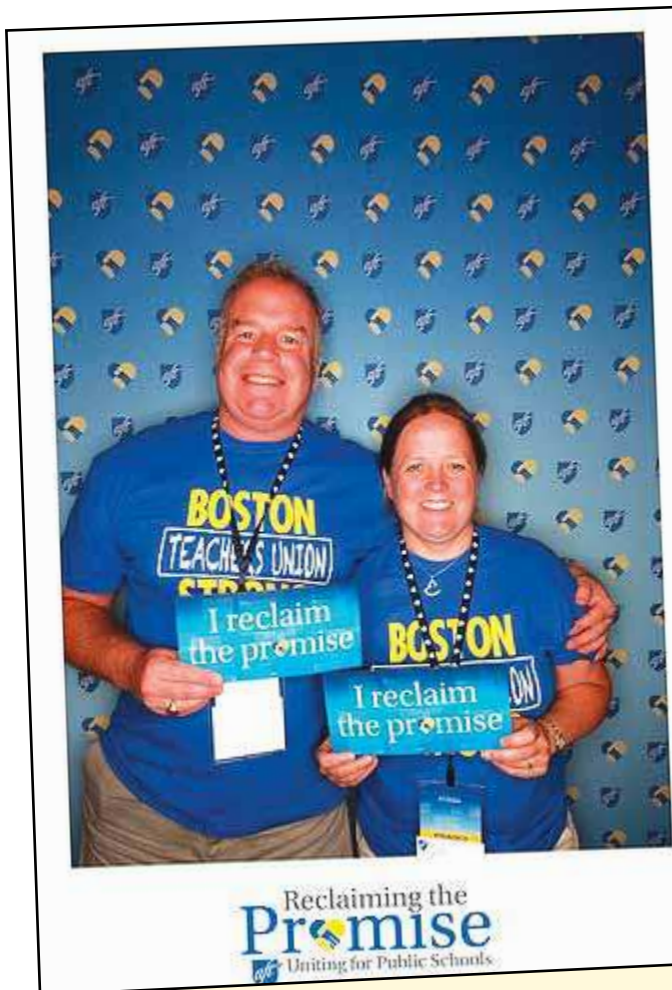
How can twenty years go by and not one "success" be replicated statewide? In keeping with the TEACH theme, the promise has gone off track. We need to reclaim education. In this case we need to remind the public what the original promise was and expose what has happened since.

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)*



This year, per new membership policy, selection for the biennial TEACH conference was not by delegate vote. Instead members were asked to apply online and a committee chose 47 from the applicant pool. In two years the BTU will again seek applicants for the national convention which brings educators from across the country together to improve their craft. Please look for the announcements in this newspaper and in e-bulletins in Spring, 2015.

This year's attendees were **Erik Berg, Denise Berkley, Cleata Brown, Robert Carroll, Brenda Chaney, Christine Choukas, Patrick Connolly, Angela Cristiani, Susan Farb, Janey Frank, Caitlyn Gaffny, Heather Gorman, Christine Gorman-Arnold, Dana Griswold, Thomas Hocker, Darcel Hunt, Chima Ikonne, Jason Joseph, Naeemah Kennedy, Karen Kilmain-Patriquin, Jeannette Lake, Barry Lawton, Melissa Lioz, Bernadine Lormilus, Michael Maguire, Gayle Marrow, Susan McCauley, Johnny McInnis, Michael McLaughlin, Patricia Melanson, Ezinwa Nwankwo, Nonye Obiora, Ann O'Keefe, Sheryl Pedone, James "Timo" Philip, Debra Price, Teresa Reaves, Thomas Rose, Jewell Royster-Bratton, David Russell, Kara Stafford, Richard Stutman, Jessica Tang, Paul Tenney, Paul Tritter, Karen Wood, and Alice Yong.**

# Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education

by Randi Weingarten,  
AFT National President

An excerpt from her opening remarks at  
AFT TEACH 13.

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 we must reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as what public education can be to fulfill our collective obligation, our community's obligation, to help all children succeed.

Reclaiming the promise of public education is about fighting for neighborhood

public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning. Reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that teachers are well-prepared, are supported and have time to collaborate. 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 children are engaged. It makes our public schools the center of the community and fulfills their purpose as an anchor 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 works. It's a vision of what parents want for their kids. And it's a movement that can stop the privatizers, profiteers 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 lead-

ers. We need to open their eyes to the good things happening in our schools—as well as the challenges we face. We need to open their minds to our vision for great neighborhood public schools. We need to open their hearts to joining with us in the effort to ensure all our children get the great education they need and deserve.

And to do this, we need to open our schools—inviting parents, neighbors, civic, business, faith 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 the very place we care about so much, the public schools where our children are nurtured and educated.

Only by working together can we reclaim the promise of public education.



AFT National President Randi Weingarten prepares to speak at the recent AFT TEACH Conference.

## IMPORTANT: RETELLS INFO SESSION:

### INFORMATION SESSION ON THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY ED (DESE) SEI ENDORSEMENT/RETELL

**FOR ALL CORE CONTENT TEACHERS:** As DESE moves forward with the implementation of the new SEI Endorsement requirement for all core content teachers of ELLs and the administrators who supervise them, BPS- Office of English Language Learners (OELL), in partnership with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) will host an information session to assist in better understanding the expectations of this change.

**Date: Thursday, August 22, 2013, 3-6 PM**  
**Location: Boston Teachers Union Hall**

**Audience:** For core academic teachers who may teach one or more English Language Learners (ELLs) during the 2013-14 school year and administrators who supervise these teachers.

**To RSVP and submit your questions in advance please go to:**  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1XKtvQ1Ub1-iVJlaS5FuuaCuwF7UGvf6HOJliGXPg1s/viewform?embedded=true>

**As a reminder:** Additional information is to be sent to your work email address ([@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:@boston.k12.ma.us)) during the 1<sup>st</sup> week in August from DESE. It is important that teachers and administrators check in to their work email address this summer and keep their email inbox clear so as not to miss out of important updates that will be forthcoming from DESE about this initiative.

### IMPORTANT DATES ABOUT REGISTRATION FOR RETELL COURSES

- August 1:** Enrollment opens for all SY 2014 SEI courses.. Session schedules and link to register will be sent to your BPS email account.
- August 23:** District-based sections which have not yet filled change to open enrollment.
- September 20:** Fall and full-year SEI course enrollments close.
- November 15:** Spring course enrollments close.

For more information please visit the BPS WIKI site that is periodically being updated with new information about this state initiative.  
<https://connect.mybps.org/groups/officeofenglishlanguagelearners/>

## Summer Reading: My Favorite Blogs...

(continued from page 2)

brokers involved in reshaping our public schools. With the skill of a surgeon she cuts through the rhetoric that is all too prevalent in the mainstream media to expose the motivations and profit seeking of hedge fund charter school magnates and greedy publishing firms that lobby for more and more standardized testing in our schools. Her analysis of the major private foundations (Gates, Broad, and Walton) that are in essence writing public education policy is eye opening. If you're at the beach this summer with your iPad take the time to read Diane Ravitch's blog. And then when your blood starts to boil you are only a few feet from the ocean to cool off.

If you are looking for a blog closer to home be sure to click on <http://edushyster.com/>. As its subtitle suggests the Edushyster is "Keeping an eye on the corporate education agenda".

Started in 2012 the Edushyster has a distinct Massachusetts flavor. The blog has taken off and I often find it posted by friends all over this country on their Facebook pages. As its About page suggests, the Edushyster contributes much of their success to four things:

- Idiot politicians
- A joke of an education board
- An even bigger joke of a mainstream media
- And a dash for the cash

As you might have guessed from this list, Edushyster can be a bit sarcastic and often borders on the absurd. But the biting satire often has me laughing out loud and I look forward to the posts. July started off with the post "Hedge Ur Bets", about the statistical manipulation the charter schools employ to make themselves look good. A couple of days later we were treated to "All About the Benjamins", about a 38-year old retired hedge fund manager on a quest to "rescue" public education. Later that week an examination of racism in "Other People's Children" asked the question "Why are white people so eager to advocate for the sort of schools to which they would never send their own children?"

Sometimes it makes you laugh out loud, sometimes it makes you cry, and sometimes it makes you downright angry. But there is one thing that the Edushyster will always make you do: **THINK!**

Other favorites bloggers outside Massachusetts include Fred Klonsky: Daily posts from a retired public school teacher just looking at the data (<http://preaprez.wordpress.com/>), and Jersey Jazzman: Education, politics, music, the arts, New Jersey, and whatever else strikes me (<http://jerseyjazzman.blogspot.com/>).

The current attack on public education is a national attack and it is important to find out what is happening in other parts of the country. Klonsky's blog lets us in on what is happening in Illinois and Chicago.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan used Chicago as a testing ground for many of the policies being implemented at the Federal level. And the closing of 49 public schools by Chicago mayor Rahm Emmanuel portends what may be on the agenda in Boston as the media here paints a picture of "under-utilized public schools". Illinois teachers are also facing a battle in the legislature over pension promises made by politicians who failed to adequately fund them. Klonsky brings over 30 years of teaching and activism to his blog and is well worth a read.

Jersey Jazzman writes of the war being waged against the teachers of New Jersey by Republican Governor Chris Christie. Here in Massachusetts the Democratic controlled legislature continues to write laws that supersede the contracts we bargain in Boston. Opposite sides of the same coin? If we are to fight back against the current attacks we need to know what is happening in other states. Jersey Jazzman is a place to find that out.

If you are a user of Facebook you can find all sorts of groups where all kinds of people post articles that help shed light on the issues and the fight back in the public education sphere. Many of these groups can be joined with a simple click of your mouse. Here is a list of some of my favorites:

- OPT OUT OF THE STATE TEST: The National Movement
- Public Sector Workers Are Not The Problem!
- Children are more than test scores
- Invest in our future! FULLY FUND BPS
- Parents Across America Say: Put the Parent Voice Back in Public Education!
- Dump Duncan
- Badass Teachers Association

The last one listed, Badass Teachers Association (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BadAssTeachers/>), was started this summer. In just a few weeks over 23,000 individuals have signed onto the group. The founders were Priscilla Sanstead, Dr. Mark Naison, and Marla Kilfoye. Every Monday the group has an action that often includes letter writing, phone calls, twitter posts, etc. It is teachers standing up against the abuse that too often comes our way.

In describing the reasons the BAT was formed Dr. Naison says this, "We've had enough. We are not your doormats. We are not your punching bags. We are some of the hardest working, most idealistic people in this country and we are not going to take it anymore. We are going to stand up for ourselves, and stand up for our students even if no organization really supports us. We are Badass. We are legion. And we will force the nation to hear our voice!"

Enjoy your summer reading! And see you in September.

# 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 new opportunity to answer this question. As you may know, our contract has established a new initiative, housed at the BTU, dedicated to professional development. The BTU Professional Learning Initiative (originally known as the Professional Development Institute) is our chance to impact the way we as school professionals 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 core beliefs that will guide our work. In the coming weeks, there will be many opportunities, in-person and online, for you to help shape the values and 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 personal experience. Be on the lookout 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 celebrate and share that work. I am eager to learn about what is working, and I want

to get out to your school to see the work in action. Is your school implementing a new curriculum? Do you have an innovative approach to the Common Core? Are you working together to create more meaningful family and community partnerships? Are you finding

new ways to use technology to create more authentic, connected student learning experiences? Does your school 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 classrooms and hallways? Are you experimenting with new teamwork structures or collaborative planning? Are you trying out project-based or interdisciplinary learning? 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.

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](mailto: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.



Paul Tritter

# "ME" vs. "WE" Improving our schools through union and community engagement

By Jessica Tang,  
BTU Director of Organizing

When I first started teaching, I have to admit, I was a bit self-centered. Everything was all about me. I felt like I was "better" because I stayed late after school to tutor students and stayed late into the evening to plan lessons. I sacrificed my April vacation and planned a yearly trip to Washington D.C. for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. I started a recycling program. I coached the girls basketball team; I...blah, blah, blah.

I was forced to confront this focus on my own egocentricity when, during my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, I was in the middle of another "but I..." statement and was cut off with a: "It's not all about you."

It was a hurtful, rude awakening. In hindsight, I can admit it was deserved and eventually enlightening, but I was still licking my wounds days later. I reflected on the statement and dug deep to unpack what I could learn from the experience. It took some time, but today, it is a sentence that still resonates deeply with me. Over the years I have really begun to understand how true the statement is – public education is not all about any specific one of us. Educating students, defending public education, making schools better is not all about the "I" or the "me," it's about the "we."

Unfortunately, there is a culture and narrative pervasive in education reform right now where we are waiting for "supermen" and "superwomen" to come in and "save" poor, inner-city public school students. There is a focus on individualism, merit, rewards, and competition and the framing is often patriarchal and patronizing. In 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 winners and losers models to children – none of whom deserve to be kicked out or shut out.

Based on our experiences, we know better. There are successful public schools. Given the right leadership and resources, schools can do better. Yes, teaching is not 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 struggling day to day to do better despite lack of supports and in spite of difficult teaching conditions. There are those who do go above and beyond and get the recognition they deserve, but for every educator recognized, there are many more going above and beyond in whatever capacity they can without the recognition. Thus, whenever a few of us 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 collectively.

This means engaging with our union and just as importantly, the larger community of parents, students and family members that live in Boston's neighborhoods and care deeply about the future of its 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 – advocating for policies and practices that we know will help us to meet the needs of our students – collective action, collective voice, and the power of a unified 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 the work I do. I am grateful to have the opportunity to help and support

our union in this work as I take a leave of absence from teaching to serve as the Director of Organizing. 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, have much work to do.

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

- Summer Open Houses to express your ideas and opinions about professional development and membership and community engagement
- Prospective Building Rep Info Sessions and running for Building Rep.
- Joining a committee, such as the new Community Engagement Committee or New Members Engagement Committee
- Attending the upcoming BTU Mayoral Forum on Wednesday, September 11, 7 pm
- Attending monthly membership meetings the second Wednesday of every month at the BTU and/or regional membership meetings this year.

Even if you are unable 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, neighbors, community members
- Staying informed as much as possible by reading the E-bulletin (sign up at [www.btu.org](http://www.btu.org)) and taking the time to read all correspondences 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. There will be both a new mayor and new superintendent. Public education will face very different paths based upon who may take the helm in both of these positions. We may follow in the steps of other cities where the corporate playbook calls for increases in independent charters to divert funds and non-ELL and special education students. This leads to lower test scores in public schools and "excess unfilled seats." This then becomes the reason for more school closures and massive teacher layoffs. This is how the public education sector is being privatized. However, if we are able to organize our members, our community allies, and potential allies, we may be able to stem the tide of corporate reforms and push our city to embark on 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.



Jessica Tang

## 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 staffers Paul Tritter ([ptritter@btu.org](mailto:ptritter@btu.org)) and Jessica Tang ([jtang@btu.org](mailto:jtang@btu.org)) would love to meet you. Paul will be leading the new BTU Professional Development Institute to support teachers 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 this work, meet us, and share your ideas about professional development, involvement in the BTU, and community partnerships!

**Thursday, Aug. 8, 3-5 pm** (\*please note time change) at the Mattapan Library, 1350 Blue Hill Ave., Mattapan, MA 02126

**Monday, Aug. 19, 10 am-noon** at the Boston Teachers Union

**Tuesday, Aug. 27, 5-7 pm** at the Center for Leadership Development (CLD) at Madison Park, 75 Malcolm X Blvd., Boston, MA 02120, adjacent to the O'Bryant

### Prospective Building Rep Info Session:

Have you thought about running for Building Representative? Do you want to know more about what Building Reps do? Come to an info session!

**Wednesday, Aug. 21, 1-3, OR 3-5pm** at the Boston Teachers Union

### Mayoral Candidate Forum hosted by the BTU:

Following the **First Membership Meeting of the Year!**

**Wednesday, Sept. 11, 7pm** at the Boston Teachers Union, 180 Mt. Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125

### SAVE THE DATE! BTU Annual Conference:

The annual conference is an opportunity for building representatives to help shape the annual goals of the union and to receive training to support these goals. This year's date is:

**Friday-Sunday, October 25-27**, at the Dedham Hilton

# We're Learning Here A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.

## Whalan Primary School in Australia

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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

*Amika*   
[amika45@comcast.net](mailto:amika45@comcast.net)

**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*.



Third graders are learning how to use baseball mitts to catch tennis balls.



A group of kindergarten students working "Celebrations" paintings.



A wide covered verandah outside preschool classrooms provides room for art activities.



Writing stories in a primary class.



Principal Jo-Ann Lock asks a student to explain what he's doing.



Preschoolers from two different schools "mix and mingle" while waiting for instructions.



A student in a grade 5/6 classroom showing her teacher where to find Boston!



This is a small part of the kitchen gardens planted, maintained and harvested by 3-6 grade classes.



A student with special needs practices making his letters on an iPad.

(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.)