EACH year at this time the BTU holds an annual conference with representatives from our schools. The conference has a few purposes: to develop a better working relationship between the union and our local BTU building representatives; 2) to help our representatives develop new and improved skills that will be useful in problem solving and communicating at the building level; and networking. We also try to do a little socializing, as it is a big request on our end to ask 150 people to give up an entire weekend.

This year’s conference was truly a joint effort. As you probably know the BTU membership last year approved the hiring of a full-time organizer, Jessica Tang, who has been working diligently on improving our internal capacity as well as our ‘school-based energy level.’ She has also worked on developing our relationships with outside community organizations. We, along with the school department, have also hired a full-time director of Professional Learning, Paul Tritter. Paul has been busy gauging the membership’s interest and needs in all facets PD. They, along with Angela Cristiani, our full-time Political Organizer and Brenda Chaney, our one-third time parent outreach coordinator, played a large role in organizing our conference with the help of our field representatives, Michael, Caren, and Josefa, who prepared two detailed and interesting workshops. We also got help on planning the conference from Executive Board members Laura Lee Johnson, Rob Carroll, and Garrett Virchick. Patrick Connolly gave a thorough explanation of the performance evaluation process and Michael brought in two speakers from MassCosh to discuss healthy and (hopefully) Green schools. In all, the conference was spirited and interactive. ‘Boring’ was a word I did not hear.

In the opening plenary the BTU president gave a balanced view of some of the key issues of today:

The growth of charismatic charters will create a few difficult challenges for the BPS. On the one hand, our limited resources (dollars and buildings/space) are being stretched thin as charters seek to expand. With a new mayor being elected, the struggles over charters will undoubtedly be exacerbated. Another problem with the growth of charters, this one a social and educational one, is what we might call a re-segregation of our school system. We now have a dual school system.

On the one hand, we have an expansion of charter schools that practice selective educational opportunities for those students, by and large, who are neither ELs nor children with special needs. On the other hand, we’re trying to improve our own schools which willingly and responsibly welcome all students regardless of their challenges. We’re not looking for credit for what we ought to be doing. It’s our responsibility to educate all students and we’d have it no other way. But we don’t think that charters, which rely on public dollars, ought to encourage poor public policy and drain resources from schools that are doing the right thing.

There is also a conflict arising within our school system with the growth of autonomous schools, which do not have to accept any participants via the transfer or the PTPP process (but not if a layoff is threatened), and the increasing number of teachers who find themselves without positions. Approximately one-third of our teaching vacancies are now found in autonomous schools—which leaves the district barely sufficient vacancies to accommodate our work force. Given the growth of additional autonomous schools (Turnaround, Innovations, Horace Mann charters, Blueprint-managed (English HS and the E. Greenwood), and newly-designated level five schools at the Dever and the Holland) we are facing a staffing dilemma: We have more people leaving schools only to find fewer available vacancies. Add to this the potential of additional school closings—always on the horizon—and we have the makings of a staffing crisis.

Finally, there’s the issue of resources. Our...
Commentary by Garret Virchick

Teachers support raising Massachusetts minimum wage and earned sick time for all

Over the past month Boston Teachers have dedicated taking time out of their busy schedules to collect signatures for a petition drive to improve the lives of low wage fast food and other service workers who have been dubbed “the working poor.”

Raise Up Massachusetts is a coalition of labor and community groups put together this past summer. Its goal is to collect signatures for 2 ballot initiatives in 2014. One is to raise the minimum wage from $8/hr to $10.50/hr and the other to institute 40 hours of sick time. The petitions would also raise the minimum wage of tipped workers to 60% of the full minimum wage.

The second initiative is to insure that all employees have the opportunity to earn 1 hour of sick time for every 30 hours worked. There would be a cap of 40 hours earned per year. Currently many non-union workers are at risk of losing their jobs whenever they get sick or miss work due to family needs. Not only is this unfair to workers, it is also puts the public at risk of exposure to disease.

Minimum wage laws were introduced nationally in 1938, although Massachusetts instituted a minimum wage law in 1912 for women and children. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was a start, in part as a result of the struggle of millions of low-wage workers during the Great Depression. That decade also saw the unionization of many of the workers who were said to be low skilled. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organized many. For the first time unskilled workers were able to live in dignity, have a good life, and raise a stable family. As a result the middle class was built in this country.

Currently many non-union workers are at risk to get our schools up to what we might call the middle-class level. (To get our schools up to what we consider the middle-class level. It was a foot in the door. But over the years as the unions were built in this country, workers were able to live in dignity, have a good life, and raise a stable family. As a result the middle class was built in this country.)

But like our fathers and grandfathers who worked to provide a better life for their families, the minimum wage worker today deserves to live a decent life too. Raising the minimum wage today to $10.50/hr will still not even meet the standard that was in place in 1965. But just as the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was a start, this ballot initiative can be the start of a broader movement for economic justice in this country. It can be the first step in building a movement for a living wage standard, so that everyone who works gets a chance to provide for their children and live a decent life.

Teachers need to be part of this movement. We see first hand the effects of poverty wages on the lives of our students. As part of the Raise Up Massachusetts Coalition, who as of November 1st has been able to collect 88,923 signatures for the Minimum Wage initiative and 78,047 for the Earned Sick Time initiative. Thank you to all the teachers who have taken part in collecting signatures and who will continue to be part of the broader movement for economic justice in the Commonwealth.

Commentary by Michael J. Maguire

Making a case for instant runoff voting

The recent mayoral election was exciting. Many different candidates with differing ideas criss-crossed the city. What a breath of fresh air this election was after nearly two decades of seemingly non-existent elections. (I mean no offence to former mayor Menino and his challengers; but compared to this year’s election, the others were very quiet indeed).

Our democracy is supposed to allow us to choose our leaders, and to choose them often. Sadly, the current city charter calls for such a “strong” mayor that incumbency means nearly automatic re-election. It’s a safe bet that eleven people won’t challenge our new mayor next year. What a pity. The many lively debates informed us as a citizenry and gave greater meaning to participatory democracy. As fantastic as it was that 12 men and women stepped forward to lead us, it is a bit troubling that Marty Walsh and John Connolly advanced to the finals with only a combined 35% of the vote. That means that nearly twice as many voters voted for candidates other than the two primary winners. To some, including myself, this seems undemocratic.

I propose that we Bostonians adopt instant runoff voting (IRV) in future mayoral elections. IRV is a system where voters rank the candidates in preferential order, from first to last. In such a system, if a candidate does not win a majority after the first counting, then the “instant runoff” begins. The candidate with the fewest votes is then removed from the list. All his votes are examined for his second choice selections. Those votes are then added to the various candidates’ first votes and a new total is compiled.

If after this second round of counting there still is not a majority winner, the process continues until one candidate has a majority of votes. That person is then declared the winner. There is no primary and final, just one IRV and one winner. A municipality can save money by funding only one election.

It stands to reason that when there are more candidates, more supporters come out to vote. Sadly, when one’s chosen candidate loses, sometimes people don’t vote in the final. By using IRV, those primary supporters vote for other candidates right then and there. Let’s take a look at the 2013 primary results. (side chart above)

I realize that the following generalizations are just that, generalizations. But let’s image some scenarios.

The BTU endorsed both Arroyo and Connolly. Which if a majority of teachers who voted for Consalvo selected Arroyo as their second choice. Then Arroyo may have had up to 18,400 votes.

What if all (or most) of those who voted for Arroyo and Barros would otherwise have voted for Golar Richie? Then Richie theoretically could have achieved 34,662 votes. That may or may not have been for her...
Know Your Rights
by Caren Carew

How do I renew my professional license?

Many BPS teachers have recertification renewal coming up in June 2013. It is up to each teacher to know the status of his/her own license and of the individual expiration dates of all. No one sends out renewal notices. It is our professional responsibility to maintain our license(s) to teach. In order to be sure of what licenses you hold and the dates of expiration, you can visit www.doe.mass.edu/fdc/look up the list and click on your specific license number. Licenses must be on the “Professional” level in order to be renewed every 5 years.

Each teacher must develop, maintain, and carry out his/her Individual Professional Development (IPD) in accordance with DOE requirements. These plans are your own and can be maintained in the format you prefer such as online, hard copy, or electronic and they must be approved by your supervisor/principal. You need to keep a folder for documenting the requisite professional development (PD) activities utilized for recertification purposes in case you are audited.

The requirement to renew your Primary Area of Certification is a minimum total of 150 PD Points (Primary Certification Points). Of the 150 PD Points, a minimum of 120 points (80% of 150) must be in the content or pedagogy of the Primary Area. Of these 120 PD Points, a minimum of 90 points must be in content and 30 may be in pedagogy. The remaining 30 points from the 150 may be in any educational elective. Each additional area of licensure (other than the Primary) requires an additional 30 PD Points of which must be in content. To renew an in-service license in an Additional Area requires 30 PD Points. To renew an Additional Program Area that is in an Inovald license requires 150 PD Points. All Professional Development workshops you should provide with PD certificates reflecting the PD points earned. Other eligible activities and their translation to PD Points are: 1 semester hour of undergraduate coursework = 15 PD Points; 1 semester hour of graduate coursework = 25 PD Points; 1 Continuing Education Unit = 10 PD Points; 1 PD In-Service Credit = 15 PD Points; 1 contact hour of workshop = 1 PD. If you’d prefer to review the requirements in the guidelines booklet for the recertification process visit the DOE website at maeducators/maeducators/maeducators/recertification/guidelines.pdf, which will provide you with specific information concerning what activities count for PD points and how many points must be earned.

To actually submit the renewal application for your license(s) online go to www.doemass.edu/fdc/look up and click the “ELAR” icon on the right that will bring you to a security portal requiring your username and password in order to proceed with the process. If you are like me, you may need to “Forgot username” and password and will you walk through the necessary steps to retrieve your user name and reset the password. If you continue to face difficulty, call the DOE at 781-338-6000 and they will reset it for you. The online application requires you to sign an affidavit which must have satisfied the PDP and other requirements. Once your application and fee (by credit card) have been submitted, the state will reactivate your license and it will be mailed to you. On occasion, the DOE will contact you after the fact for a paper audit to verify that you have met the aforementioned recertification requirements as stated in your renewal application.

Please be aware that for those who are renewing their license after June 30, 2013 or having any renewal reviewed after that time, there will be a different distribution of PD points required. Stay tuned for further info.

When are School Site Council trainings being held?

School Site Council trainings are being held on the following dates, locations and times. RSVPs are due at graceaw@btu.org at least in advance as to which training you are attending. All elected SSC members and the school administrator are encouraged to attend. Knowledge is power!

SSC 101 (Basics)
November 9, from 5:30-7:30 at Title I Training Center - Warren St. side of BLA
November 16, from 5:45-6:30 at the BTU
November 23, from 4:15-6:30 at the BTU
SSC 102 Budget
November 21, from 4:15-6:30 at the BTU
December 5, from 5:30-7:30 at the BTU
December 12, from 5:30-7:30 at Title I Training Center - Warren St. side of BLA.

Can a School Site Council (SSC) Meeting be called anytime? What constitutes a quorum? Who sets the agenda and where are the minutes?

The School Site Council is the central governing body of the school under the school-based management/decision making model. See BTU contract pages 14 – 21.

At the first meeting of the newly elected SSC, a monthly calendar should be agreed upon by the SSC members for the entire school year and be made public through distribution to all staff and parents. Any change to this calendar must be approved by the SSC with at least one week’s notice to all staff and parents. SSC Meetings should be at times convenient to the agenda, date, time, location, members present or absent, and actions taken (if quo- rum exists). The BTU contract details, “A notice of all actions taken by the SSC will be distributed to all BTU Building Representatives and the President of the Faculty Senate of the school and are included in the minutes of the Council’s meeting.” Minutes can be amended at the following SSC for corrections as a group if necessary (not reviewed/approved by the admin- istration prior to posting). Minutes should also be distributed posted on the BTU bulletin board in each school. In order for SSC’s to work, there must be inclusion of all voices and communication to all members of the school community.

The contract states, “All available infor- mation concerning the school budget and other matters over which the SSC has author- ity must be shared with members of the SSC at least five school days before they are expected to vote on these issues.” Adminis- trators should not call a last minute meeting and expect members to sign off on these mat- ters without this process taking place. Shared decision making is just that – shared.

Do teachers have to perform non-teaching tasks?

The contract states, “The parties [BTU & DOE] agree that the present practice of requiring teachers to perform non-teaching tasks is uneconomical; further it has a deter- riorating effect on the vitality and effective- ness of the teacher in the practice of his or her profession. It is therefore agreed as follows: In Elementary Schools – The Commis- sion and the Union recognize the desirability of relieving teachers of non-teaching duties such as lunch duty; duplicating of materials, collecting money for purposes such as milk, insurance, pictures and school banking. As a first step in effectuating these principles, the parties agree that elementary teachers shall have no bus duty before or after school.

In Middle Schools – A person will not be required to perform street duty where police protection is considered necessary but it is not available. A person is not required to perform traffic control. Teachers relieved by school paras of administrative assignments shall not be assigned to teaching duties in lieu of such administrative assignments. No industrial arts, vocational education, or home econom- ics teacher shall be required to perform work that is not part of the pupil instructional program or part of the teacher’s job duties. Teachers are encouraged to cooperate in meeting reasonable requests made with rea- sonable lead time prior to events related to school activities.”
Improving Professional Learning

by Paul Tritter, Director of Professional Learning

(The following is an edited version of my remarks at the BTU Building Reps Conference on October 26, 2013.)

Since the beginning of the year, I have been asking people what they believe are the qualities of great professional learning experiences (To share your answers, complete the survey at this address: http://tinyurl.com/PLEsurvey). The runaway most popular answer was “telling a story.”

The mission of the Professional Learning Initiative is to make professional development for educators in the Boston Public Schools better, more meaningful, and relevant. It’s a big job, and several legs must be involved to make it happen. I came to understand that the only way to truly impact a school’s culture, and therefore professional learning, is to begin from the ground up with educators leading the way.

I have lived with professional learning for years. I believe it can be grown organically from within a school, when its design grows from the needs identified by the professionals in the building. The truth is that for all the bad rap that PD gets, and I know that “Professional Development” is a four letter word for many of us, I know from experience that there is a better way to go about it.

As I see it, the work of the Professional Learning Initiative is to transform the culture of our profession from one in which professional development is done TO us, where we are professionally developed by others, into a culture where we ENGAGE in professional learning because it sustains us. We need a culture that recognizes that the professional work of teachers and para-professionals, nurses, and related service providers, coaches and counselors is learning.

In order to help our students become the people they want to be, we MUST see our work as learning, learning to be better at what we do. Not because we aren’t good now, in fact, we are really good, but because we know we can always be better. I believe that professional learning will sustain us in this profession today, and will help us attract and retain great colleagues in the future.

So why does this matter? It matters, because as a labor union, the source of our power is our work. If we want to beat back corporate reform, influence elections, and advocate for ourselves, we have to continuously build our power by improving our work. Waiting for someone else to professionally develop us hasn’t exactly worked out the way we’d hoped. By establishing this Professional Learning Initiative in our contract, we have taken more responsibility for directing our own learning and our own profession.

We are just at the beginning, a little under two months in, and I want to let you know what I’ve been doing to lay the groundwork toward achieving this goal.

First, I’ve been trying to gain an understanding of the landscape. We have a number of professional challenges to address, including the ongoing implementation of the performance evaluation system, the Common Core State Standards, RETELL, a new Code of Conduct, and a new district Health and Wellness Policy.

Many of these will require some form or another of professional development. I have been meeting and working with the various district offices to bring our voice to shaping the way these policies are implemented, stressing at every turn the need for new ways to let us, the professionals who do the work, lead the work.

But I’m getting kind of lonely in these meetings, so just this past week we announced the formation of the Professional Learning Advisory Board. This board will drive my work and shape the answers to the questions about what types of professional learning opportunities the union should be providing to our members and what types of policies we should be advocating for at the school and district levels. (For more information or to apply, please visit http://bit.ly/PLAboard or http://bit.ly/PLAdesign).

Most importantly, though, I have been listening. In September and early October, we held a series of meetings to begin to shape a mission and vision for the work of the Professional Learning Initiative. In the coming weeks, everyone will have an opportunity to read and respond and suggest changes to the mission that arose from those meetings and the online survey. We will create it together, and it will guide the work of the PLI and the Advisory Board.

One area where we haven’t yet done much work is in the school-based PD. This contractual time represents both our greatest opportunity for the relevant collaborative professional learning we want, but it is also frequently the most frustratingly useless part of our job. We need to do something about it because the best professional learning, the most relevant PD, happens closest to the classroom it is school-based, and it is job-embedded. It is part of the work we do every day.

I am asking all of you to help me gather information about how PD is done in buildings across the city. If you are a building leader who is not able to contribute to this online survey, please contact me at ptritter@bostonunion.org so I can tell you how to be included in this process.

There is a lot of work ahead, and it is early in the planning process, but I am confident that we are capable of improving the state of professional learning in our district one step at a time.

As always, I look forward to hearing your ideas. You can always contact me at ptritter@btu.org.

Support Boston Public School Bus Drivers

Commentary by Heidi Winston, BTU Pilot School

Many Boston school bus drivers walked-off the job on October 4, 2013 for a one day strike because the private bus company they work for, Veolia, has not recognized the Union Contract. Five bus drivers have been fired by Veolia for their participation in the walk-out. Yes, they should have done a better job of preparing families for this crisis. However, he and a delegation of drivers worked closely with the building, the City of Boston for the bus drivers, have been fighting for the health and safety of Boston Public School children. The driver maintained order, the bus monitor. Another bus driver came on the side of the road with about 15 children waiting for approximately ½ hour on the side of the road because the bus smelled of exhaust fumes. The children waited for approximately 5 minutes when they spent hours every week trying to retrieve their full salaries. Sources say that the GPS system is not being used for its intended purpose, but is being used illegally to cut drivers’ pay. Simply put, drivers are not being paid for hours worked.

News sources according to the Bus Driver’s Union report that, over past several months, the company refused to address more than 50 grievances which included short paychecks and illegally cut hours. Veolia does not recognize the Union leadership. The bus drivers are treated rudely when they spend hours every week attempting to retrieve their full salaries. Sources say that the GPS system is not being used for its intended purpose, but is being used illegally to cut drivers’ pay. Simply put, drivers are not being paid for hours worked.

News sources also point out that Veolia is an international company known for union busting, and mistreatment of workers and communities. City Counselor Charles Yancey attempted to mediate the stand-off between Veolia and drivers. However, he and a delegation of drivers were driven from the bus by yard by management and police.

According to the website, the United Steel Workers, which represent the bus drivers, have been fighting for the health and safety of Boston Public School children for many years. They have been fighting for bus monitors, new buses and cleaner exhaust systems – all vital for the health, safety and learning of our children.

Fortunately enough, last week on my morning travels to work I passed an appar- ently broken down Boston Public school bus. I stopped to help the bus monitor who was on the side of the road with about 15 children. She was doing a great job keeping them safe. I learned that the bus driver stopped the bus and called for a replace- ment because the bus smelled of exhaust fumes. The children waited for approxi- mately ½ hour on the side of the road with the bus monitor. Another bus driver came bringing a replacement driver, monitor and children. The driver maintained order, acted responsibly and professionally mak- ing it possible for those elementary children to travel to and from school safely.

The Boston Public School bus drivers are our labor brothers and sisters. We need to do everything possible to help and support them and pay for the work they do. Their fight is our fight, which includes the health and safety of Boston’s school children. 

Paul Tritter
Director of Professional Learning
Interim Superintendent John McDonough meets with BTU

Interim Superintendent John McDonough addresses the BTU membership.
"The March on Washington" by William P. Jones

A Book Review
by Paul Tenney

On a hot and humid day, August 28th, 1963 in Washington D.C. a quarter of a million people gathered to protest for Jobs and Freedom. They gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial and settled as far east as the Washington Monument to listen to several speakers who exhorted them to protest and take action.

The main speaker was A. Phillip Randolph, the famous black labor leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters who a generation earlier had gotten the attention of President Franklin D. Roosevelt over the issue of fair and non-discriminatory treatment in the distribution of war related jobs. That issue led to the establishment of the FEPC—the Fair Employment Practices Committee.

In 1945, A. Phillip Randolph’s 14th largest city, uses IRV for its mayoral election. San Francisco, the model for local elections. San Francisco, the town and big cities are adopting the IRV scheme. It is gaining popularly in the US. Small towns and big cities are adopting the IRV model for local elections. San Francisco, the 14th largest city, uses IRV for its mayoral elections. The Oscars are determined by IRV and IRV is used in national elections in Australia and Ireland.

Nothing about our new mayor, but more than five times as many people voted against him in the primary as voted for him. We as a society need to be more inclusive; IRV can facilitate this.

Moreover a small but determined Christian group in Georgia led by a young minister named Martin Luther King began the non-violent assault on the segregation of public services and public facilities. They expanded this area to voting rights as well. They were met by violent opposition in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.

The main group – The Southern Christian Leadership Conference-Kings group began to have competition from the more militant SNCC—the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. The latter was led by John Lewis. SNCC wanted a more aggressive approach to protest even if it meant putting oneself in danger for the cause. Lewis himself was badly beaten at the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama. He was to give a fiery speech at the March on Washington that had to be toned down somewhat but nevertheless was memorable for its passion.

The historic speeches by Dr. King came at about 5 in the afternoon when the marchers were nearly exhausted by the weather and the speeches. They got a huge emotional and psychological pickup from King with an oration for the ages. The famous conclusion “Thank God Almighty we are free at last” came from a Negro spiritual and was brilliantly abridged by King. It brought the marchers to their feet in joyous exaltation. It got huge and exclusive media attention but it upstaged A. Phillip Randolph whose purpose for the March was for Jobs and Equality.

King’s speech put Civil Rights front and center in a year (1963) when no Civil Rights Act was passed yet and racist segregation was still legal throughout the United States and many American citizens of color were forbidden to vote because of their race.

Randolph and Lewis were invited to the White House and served sandwiches and milk by President John F. Kennedy. The youthful President would die by an assassin’s bullet three months later. But before he died he worked to pass several Civil Rights bills and a stronger Fair Employment Commission.

The year 1963 was to see more tragedy including the horrific bombing in Birmingham where four black girls were murdered in a stunning act of racial violence. In fact violence directed against black and white civil rights workers escalated throughout the winter of 1963 and 1964.

I was at this great gathering quite by happenstance. I was working at the National Archives in Washington as an archivist intern under Northeastern University’s Co-op program. It was a vacation break from one of the most hectic events going on around me. Most of my colleagues at the Archives cautioned me to stay away. They were well meaning and they were responding to the racial hysteria fostered by the mainstream media at the time. It is said that even President Kennedy feared a bloody race riot but was assured by Randolph and Rustin that their disciplined March would take responsibility for that. They did so admirably.

But ordinary citizens in the street, including many of my coworkers, were frightened to death. Ignoring this I went away on my lunch hour and walked the six blocks southwest to the Washington Monument where I met several members of The International Ladies Garment Workers Union. It was from them that I learned a lot of Union and Civil Rights History including a lot of data that corroborates William P. Jones’ history of the day and the movement.

William P. Jones, a Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin has written the single best book on the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom. His scholarship is flawless and his writing lucid and passionate. He has called a great deal of data from a wealth of African American labor unions and organizations, especially Black women’s organizations, that even President Kennedy feared a bloody race riot but was assured by Randolph and Rustin that their disciplined March would take responsibility for that. They did so admirably.

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Pre-Tax Benefit for BTU Members

Flexible Spending Plan allows Pre-Tax Income to be used for certain medical, dependent care expenses and some transportation and parking expenses

Great program, little effort, terrific savings

Open Enrollment 10/21-11/22: Sign Up at BTU on 11/7 from 2:30 to 4:30 pm

By Richard Stutman, Director

A benefit plan that allows eligible employees to set aside $2,500 in pre-tax income in the calendar year for certain medical expenses is now in effect. To be eligible for the plan, employees must work at least 20 hours per week (full-time or more) on a regular basis. For further information on eligibility, please call 1-800-544-2340.

Under the city’s Flexible (Medical) Spending Account (FSA), eligible employees who opt for inclusion will be reimbursed for a variety of out-of-pocket medical expenses (such as doctor/dentist co-pays, prescriptions, and chiropractic, acupuncture, as examples) with pre-tax dollars which are exempt from federal, state and FICA taxation. A typical teacher who joins the plan can save up to $323 of out-of-pocket medical expenses per year. Retirement contributions are not eligible for the Medical/Dental reimbursements can be completed at the point of sale via a debit card.

The plan essentially parallels the Dependent Care Plan (DCAP), which allows pre-tax dollars to be used for dependent care, such as day care or elder care.

Over 600 city employees have joined one or both of the plans, with the number much doubling in each of the last few years. The application deadline for setting up a deduction for 2014 is November 22, 2013. Open enrollment is on or before November 7 from 2:30 to 4:30 or call 1-800-544-2340 for an application, which can also be downloaded at www.cpa234.com. Other sites for signing up are also available; call 1-800-544-2340. This is a terrific, relatively seamless way, to save money by using pre-tax dollars for a variety of expenses.

The plan also allows people to set aside pre-tax dollars for some parking expenses ($245 per month) and mass transit expenses (also $245 per month). For more information on all of the above, please see www.cpa234.com or call 1-800-544-2340 for a brochure and a more detailed listing. • You can get reimbursed for expenses incurred prior to 12/31/12.

A few points about the Flexible Spending Account Medical Plan

• Out-of-Pocket Medical expenses are broadly defined and include for example, deductibles for visits and procedures, out-of-pocket medical expenses, hearing devices, special telephones for the hearing impaired, dental care, orthodontic care, vision care, and contact lenses to mention just a few.

You can get reimbursed for expenses incurred up to your annual (full) deduction regardless of how much has been deducted from your paycheck as of the date of claim. (NB: The DCA works differently in this regard. In the DCAP, your reimbursement schedule cannot outpace your contribution schedule.)

• You cannot generally make changes (including a stop) in your contribution schedule after the second calendar year unless your circumstances change. A complete explanation can be found in the brochure published by CPA.

• You will forfeit moneys not used in the calendar year, so you must be very careful in setting up your contributions.

For more information on all of the above, please see www.cpa234.com. Other sites for signing up are also available; call 1-800-544-2340 for full information.

All plans are relatively straightforward and provide a great tax benefit, but employees also have to be careful in setting up and maintaining the plan.

• You cannot generally make changes (including a stop) in your contribution schedule after the second calendar year unless your circumstances change.

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Transportation Accounts

Flexible expenses include daily or monthly parking expenses and mass transit expenses (including a T Pass) related to your commute for work. As above, call the 800 number or see the webpage for more information.

How to Sign Up

One can call CPA, Inc., at 1-800-544-2340 during the year’s Open Enrollment and have an application mailed, mailed out to the employee, and then returned with a signature to CPA by 1-800-544-2340. If you have any questions, please call CPA, the city’s Group Insurance Office at 617-635-4570, or the webpage www.cpa234.com.

Current participants will receive an authorization form mailed directly to their home address shortly. If you are a current participant and haven’t gotten the authorization form by mid November, please call Kim at CPA, Inc., and you will get a re-authorization form mailed to you. The application form is not automatic. If you are not a current participant, you MUST call 1-800-544-2340, enroll online, or show up at the open house.

RTC Executive Board Minutes

September 9, 2013

Members present: Annie-Marie Addu- cci; Anne Broder; Marie Broderick; Mary Cahalane; Donna Cooley-Hilton; Martha Cotton; Larry Connelly; David Donovan, Cahalane; Donna Cooley-Hilton; Martha Kalta; Mary Jo Murphy; Linda McNamee; and Paul Tenney, Social Committee Member; Mary Gaughan. Excused: Sandy Carlisle and Eileen Ganley. The meeting was opened by the Chair man at 10:15 am.

Reports

Secretary: June’s minutes were read and accepted.

Treasurer: June’s Treasurer’s report was read and accepted. Chairman: The Chairman requested that the report be revised. Co-Chairman: There was very little activity over the summer. Only seven new members were added. Report Accepted. Co-Chairman: Chairman, Phil Fasano, was able to negotiate with Delta to Prevent their increase in the premium from an average of 5% to 14%. The Board accepted his proposal. The Board accepted his proposal.

Chairman: The Chairman requested that the report be revised. Co-Chairman: There was very little activity over the summer. Only seven new members were added. Report Accepted. Co-Chairman: Chairman, Phil Fasano, was able to negotiate with Delta to Prevent their increase in the premium from an average of 5% to 14%. The Board accepted his proposal. The Board accepted his proposal.

Meeting was reconvened at 11:15 am. June’s Treasurer’s report was read and accepted. Chairman: The Chairman requested that the report be revised. Co-Chairman: There was very little activity over the summer. Only seven new members were added. Report Accepted. Co-Chairman: Chairman, Phil Fasano, was able to negotiate with Delta to Prevent their increase in the premium from an average of 5% to 14%. The Board accepted his proposal. The Board accepted his proposal.

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The combined Dever-McCormack K-8 School has to be one of the largest in BPS, with approximately 1200 students. Located on Harbor Point in Dorchester, the BPS still lists the two buildings as separate schools and only the Lower School (Grades K-5) has had “Turnaround” status for the past four years.

I was delighted when Director of Operations Sarah McLaughlin gave me maps of both buildings, showing rooms and teacher names – a first, in my experience! As I walked through the halls, I noticed the message “Work hard. Work together. Panther Pride” just about everywhere. A variety of community service organizations provide support during the school day; City Year and Tenacity members were noticeable in almost every classroom I visited. In case you’re wondering, it can cost up to $50,000/year to have one of these groups in a school.

I started my visit at the Upper School, where students arrive two hours earlier than at the Lower School. A class of seventh graders was learning how to use microscopes; across the hall a colorful display of student-created “Life Maps” decorated one wall of the Social Studies classroom. Student groups had college names! Long strips of blue painters tape marked hallway floors and I wondered if this visual reminder helps students stay in line during transitions. Reading, writing and math activities dominated most classrooms. At one end of the second floor was the Specialist cluster, where I reconnected with Theater Arts teacher Stephanie Marson-Lee and Marlon Forrester, a Visual Arts teacher I’d met at the Hennigan Elementary School a few years ago. I enjoyed watching Susan Jarvis lead her students in a short performance on their violins, some with bow, others with fingers. There were beginners as well as experienced players in the same class, and I was impressed by how seriously each student took his or her performance. Clearly they had all learned a lot in the first few weeks of the school year!

At the Lower School every class is taught in two languages, an innovation supported by former Hernandez teacher and now assistant principal, Christine Cronin. Every other week is taught in English or Spanish, requiring an amazing degree of cooperative effort and shared responsibility on the part of teachers. I liked the big map of the world outside third grade classrooms featuring photos of students and showing the countries from which they or their families came. I enjoyed seeing children reading books selected from classroom libraries rather than a Reading Street text, which is simply an updated basal reader program. In one class students were annotating text with sticky notes, while down the hall others were using highlighters to mark passages in a story being read aloud by their teacher.

As I write this, meetings are being held to determine whether or not the Dever will be taken over by the state for low test scores. I can only wonder what they would do differently, if anything, and how that would affect current staff efforts to create an integrated K-8 community.

Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. "We're Learning Here" Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.