We are caught up in an unyielding, cynical war against public education

Let us first congratulate Marty Walsh and John Connolly. Both ran an excellent campaign. Marty developed a top-notch organization where it mattered and turned out his supporters, and John was put front and center. Both deserve credit for their accomplishments. That said, of course we are disappointed that both of our recommended candidates, Felix Arroyo and Rob Consalvo, fell short. We are proud, however, that both Felix and Rob finished strongly with their heads held high, and their positions and hopes intact. We thank both for upholding our values throughout the campaign. We wish them well and know that the next chapter of their careers is just beginning, that both have a lot to offer our city.

As I write this early the morning after the primary it is too early to read and hear what the pundits will say, but this is for sure: We got caught up in an unyielding, cynical war against public education. Three of the top four candidates supported getting rid of the cap on charter schools. The fourth candidate was a ‘maybe.’ Make no mistake: This was a defining issue in the campaign. The tone of cynicism starts from the top, at the presidency of the United States, led by privatizer in chief, Arne Duncan.

While disappointed, we will move on and continue our work to improve our schools, promote the concept of leveling the educational playing field for our English Language Learners and Children with Special Needs, and maintaining the ‘public’ in public education.

As we pointed, we will move on and continue our work to improve our schools, promote the concept of leveling the educational playing field for our English Language Learners and Children with Special Needs, and maintaining the ‘public’ in public education.

Today we will begin to map out the next phase of our involvement in the mayoral campaign, and we will shortly be in touch in that regard. Regardless of who ultimately wins the mayoralty, we will work with him and continue to best represent our students – yes, our students – as well as our members. We may have lost the battle in last months primary, but our will to be part of the process to improve our schools will not waver. Thank you.
Interim Superintendent John McDonough visits the BTU membership meeting

by Michael J. Maguire

Interim superintendent John McDonough came to the first membership meeting of the new school year. He was warmly received. Mr. McDonough began by stating that we, the teachers and BPS administration, share the accountability for improving our school system and that we have a common interest in a new mayor. Alluding to the mayoral forum held at the BTU Hall later that night, he said, “People have been talking about us, at this forum people will be talking with us.”

Citing the results of a recent Harvard study on closing the achievement gap, Mr. McDonough pointed out that the state had boasted that the BPS has done “better than any other similar program in the nation. Our impetuses are two and three times the national average.”

As a result, the BPS has the “highest enrollment in elementary schools in eight years, and our four-year graduation rate is the highest it’s been since the state started keeping records.”

“In this room there is probably the greatest group of urban educators ever assembled,” said McDonough. He then expressed his wish that the many accomplishments of the school system would be the topic of the citywide debate in education.

In times of transition we have a choice of either buckling down or moving forward. “Our obligation is to the children, so we shall move forward.”

“We believe that a strong school culture is one of collaboration and teamwork,” McDonough believes that we are all partners in this work. His hope for the BPS while he is at the helm is for faster movement on closing the achievement gap and seeing how dedicated and professional our teachers are.

In closing, Mr. McDonough stated that his view on the new evaluation tool is it is more than just about evaluations, it’s also about support and development for all teachers.
The BTU and BPS have set the following dates for SSC training that all elected SSC members are invited to attend at the BTU.

- SSC 101 - SSC Intro overview: November 7th and repeated November 14th; early evening exact time TBA; refreshments
- SSC 102 - Budget Basics: November 21st and repeated December 5th; early evening exact time TBA; refreshments

As a SPED teacher or related service provider, what do you think a student has been placed in the wrong setting?

In order to appeal a SPED placement the contract clearly states that the following must occur. “When a teacher has concerns about the placement of a student, that teacher shall make a request to the Principal or Headmaster to reconvene the team to reconsider the placement in accordance with the regulations. The evaluation team shall respond to the appeal within two weeks. If, upon reconsideration, the team finds the placement inappropriate, it shall present an IEP which contains an appropriate placement to the parent.”

Since we, as teachers and related service providers, are charged with appropriately identifying and addressing the needs of our students, it is incumbent upon us to advocate for the appropriate placement for said child to achieve their potential. We are all sensitive to budget constraints and in some cases a rush to utilize inclusion, often without adequate planning, contractually mandated votes of effective staff, and alternatives for those students for whom the inclusion model of service delivery is infeasible. We can keep in mind why we entered education, and hold fast to our passion to do what is right for each and every child in our charge! They are depending on us to do no less.

How many personal days do teachers get and how do we take them?

Generally, teachers are entitled to four (4) personal days per school year. There are specific provisions for bereavement in addition to these days. Requests to take a personal day should be submitted to the building administrator as early as possible prior to the day requested off. Except at the discretion of the building administrator (such as a school emergency), not more than 5% of teachers are eligible for a personal day at one time. No teacher may take a personal day on both the day before and the day after a school vacation, including the Thanksgiving recess. Personal days not used each year are rolled into your accumulated sick days.

Are we entitled to time for cancer screening?

Yes, there is a BPS Personnel Bulletin which states that Mayor Menino signed an Executive Order allowing all city employees to use up to four (4) hours of leave per calendar year for various types of cancer screenings, including mammogram, colon, skin, thyroid, oral cavity, lymph nodes, reproductive organs, and lungs. The procedure dictates that employees are allowed one (1) four (4) hour period that cannot be broken into hourly units. It requires that they must make their leave request through their responsibility center manager and then provide them a signed copy of a medical document verifying the date that the employee was given a cancer screening. The cancer screening time is not charged to any accumulated sick time. The code S1200 must be used to report the date that the employee was given a cancer screening. This cancer screening leave is not to be counted towards personal leave days. Requests to use this leave must be submitted at least one week in advance to the principal at School Department Headquarters and must be approved in writing by the Executive Order allowing all city employees to use up to four (4) hours of leave per calendar year for various types of cancer screenings, including mammogram, colon, skin, thyroid, oral cavity, lymph nodes, reproductive organs, and lungs. The procedure dictates that employees are allowed one (1) four (4) hour period that cannot be broken into hourly units. It requires that they must make their leave request through their responsibility center manager and then provide them a signed copy of a medical document verifying the date that the employee was given a cancer screening. The cancer screening time is not charged to any accumulated sick time. The code S1200 must be used to report the date that the employee was given a cancer screening. This cancer screening leave is not to be counted towards personal leave days. Requests to use this leave must be submitted at least one week in advance to the principal at School Department Headquarters and must be approved in writing by the principal at School Department Headquarters. If a teacher does become a cooperating teacher, the cooperating teacher loses their classroom, the cooperating teacher does not arrange for the class (grades 3-5) at the Adams School (grades 3-5) at the Adams School, which is the cooperating teacher’s responsibility. The hook up to these classes is made by the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher loses their classroom, the cooperating teacher does not arrange for the class (grades 3-5) at the Adams School (grades 3-5) at the Adams School, which is the cooperating teacher’s responsibility. The hook up to these classes is made by the cooperating teacher.

Stop, Think, and Do Something Today

This book is available to best support you, our reader, to live our lives with purpose and passion. To all readers, this message is in appreciation of your dedication to the students in our school system.

For Mental Health Awareness Day on June 6, 2013, the autistic class (grades 3-5) at the Adams School wrote about how you might help a classmate. This year’s class (grades 3-5) at the Adams School wrote about how you might help a classmate.

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BTU members and families go out to THE BALLGAME

Erik and Maceo Berg enjoy the game.

Michael Maguire and Jessica Tang hanging out at Fenway. BTW - Michael’s working the beard!

Dustin Pedroia connects on his 9th home run of the season!

Photos by Michael J. Maguire

BTU NIGHT at FENWAY PARK
BOSTON RED SOX vs.
Baltimore Orioles
SEPTEMBER 17, 2013
At the Josiah Quincy School, Friday Clubs is a special privilege afforded only to grade five students. This origami club, led by Ms. Long, the Mandarin teacher, is working on a special project. They are learning to fold paper cranes in order to teach other fifth grade students. Their goal is to have teams of 2 go to classes and use these cranes to start a conversation about how to cope with stress in a healthy manner. At the end of the class discussion, students write about how they cope with stress on the wings of the cranes. For instance, many students wrote a name of a person to whom they tell their problems. The completed cranes were strung together to create a beautiful mobile for a teacher to hang in her room.

Mimi Fong, teaches advanced Grade 5 at the Josiah Quincy School
Our Union is a strong as our members –
A call for Community Outreach

When newspaper columnists suggest that mayoral candidate John Connolly is running against the BTU, we see votes for mayor, while wooing individual members, we know that our public perception is in trouble. It doesn’t help that the mainstream media appears to be biased against us (and all unions), and provides free publicity for corporate-backed interests and opinions. However, the good news is that recent polls show that voters are more likely to vote for a candidate if we endorse them and that those who attend our schools in greatest numbers — African Americans, Hispanics, and other “minority” voters — believe that our union has improved our schools.

Still, we have much work to do to provide the information the public needs to understand our issues and the important role our union plays in advocating for staff and students, and it begins with each one of us. Oftentimes, it’s easy to “third party” our union. Instead of saying “we” or “our colleagues in the union,” we refer to “the union” as if we are not a part of it. We in the union are not just a building or an organization, but actual educators that interact with students and families every day. When we wear BTU hats (soon to be sold by students at the Harbor School through a new partnership!), we become the face of our union. When we collect signatures for ballot initiative to increase the minimum wage and provide paid sick days to those who are denied them we become the face of our union advocating for our families.

Another way to become more visible in the community is to have a stronger, more visible presence at community events in the neighborhoods of Boston. Here is where we need your help! The Community Outreach Committee is looking for more members to help at BTU tables at community events and fairs. This is an opportunity to help create stronger ties with members of our neighborhoods. We can listen and learn about the issues our families are gathering to address. We can provide information about educational issues that impact our students and families, clarify BTU positions and policies. Perhaps most importantly, we can use our knowledge and experience to answer questions and share information that will benefit students and families.

If you are able to volunteer a few hours to help us fulfill this new initiative, know of community events, or are interested in building stronger relationships with our community partners, please get in touch with the Community Outreach Committee. We are changing perceptions, one community member at a time, and we need your help!

Upcoming events:
Community Health Fair
Saturday
October 26, 2013
10 AM to 2:00 PM
Hyde Park Municipal Building
1179 River St., Hyde Park
617-635-5178

Darcel and Marjie are current members of the Community Outreach Committee. Brenda is the Community Liaison, and Jessica is the Director of Organizing.

Please e-mail jtang@btu.org to learn more about the committee and to join!

T
he BTU is proud to be a part of a new youth-driven educational justice coalition — Boston Truth: Students, Educators, and Community Members Building Power for Educational Justice. At the kick-off event of this new coalition participants discussed their vision of public education.

Learn more about the Principles of Unity at www.bostonedtruth.org. Please take 30 seconds to sign the petition and share it with other educators, students, and community members of Boston! If you are part of a community organization, it would be great to help get them to sign on, too. Please contact Jessica Tang at jtang@btu.org if you are able to do so or if you have any questions.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, the Boston Workers Alliance called for a rally on the Boston Common. Teachers were an integral part of the historic march in 1963. Members of the Boston Teachers Union also rallied in 2013 in solidarity with the BWA and other community organizations still fighting for justice today.

Principles that Unite Us

- Public schools are public institutions.
- Our voices matter.
- Stronger schools sustain stronger communities.
- Assessments should be used to improve instruction.
- A rich and varied curriculum is the key to student success.
- Quality teaching must be delivered by committed and respected educators.
- Schools must be welcoming and respectful places for all.
- Our schools must be funded for success and equity.

Scenes from the kick-off event of Boston Truth

Photos by Garret Virchick

6 BOSTON UNION TEACHER | October, 2013
Hello. As my introduction said, I am a science teacher. So, to confirm all of your fears right off the top of the page, I intend to begin with a quote that has been attributed to Albert Einstein: “Everything that is really matters comes from the mainstream media. What we hear from pundits, policymakers, and politicians is nothing but hot air, and we don’t even know what is the news even means.”

I’m sure you know where this is going. This is why I run the Boston Public Schools, along with nine other districts across the commonwealth have begun to require teachers to upload artifacts to an educator development tracking system. As we spend our time uploading (and uploading, and uploading) artifacts, we wonder whether the system will be implemented in order to get rid of the “bad” ones.

There is a tone that would an emergency room doctor respond if the same thing happened in other fields; how would they manage to keep our students safe, respected, and can grow in a setting that isn’t just a classroom. We wonder whether the system will be implemented in order to get rid of the “bad” ones.

First of all, we must do what we do best; and that is to teach our students to the best of our ability. We need to be about the “good” of teaching, but in reality it is a learned and revised set of complex skills, knowledge, and interactions that we execute throughout the day. Many of the anti-teacher pundits seem to imply that anybody could walk into a classroom of diverse learners. Something tells me it would not go smoothly. The first way that we as educators can add further to the chance of enhancing the stature of our profession is to do our jobs to the best of our ability.

However, being excellent teachers inside our classrooms is not enough to swing the pendulum of public opinion. We must consistently and publicly advocate for the field of teaching in any and all forums. Somehow, this involves going outside of the walls of our classrooms. This includes making an extra effort to show the community the transformative power of teaching beyond our classroom walls.

The third level of teacher activism involves union participation. I am preaching to the choir here, but through our professional organization we need to use a platform to inform the public of the unique skill set and its necessity to society. This is happen- ing already; during our recent contract negotiations in Bos- ton, the BTU’s rallying slogan was “Talk to Teachers” as a means to mobilize commu- nity support and construct an accurate image of teachers and their work. Our value to the Boston community is much greater than any “value added” measure, and if unanimous con- tinue to echo this message of value through open and aggressive communication, we can work to overcome the onslaught of negative press from union busting, worker right sup- pressers, and their lackeys. I urge everyone here to aggressively engage the public and swing the pendulum away from the negative teacher image in our classrooms, outside our classrooms, and particularly through union activism.

Offer struggling students extra help before and after school, and engage your students in community service, talk to your staunchly libertarian in-laws about the need for public education, and support politicians who understand union workers and will help to further liberalism. It is as if all of the world’s problems have fallen at the feet of teachers, and the world at large has become an expert on what should happen in our classrooms. Imagine if the same thing happened to your medicine now; how would an emergency room doctor respond if after waiting several hours in a busy wait- ing room the patient said “actually, I think I know what is best to do here”? There is a tone of lack of respect for the unique and hard to develop expertise that all of us have worked so hard to build up throughout our careers. So what do we do about the state of our field and the public at larges perception of it? The pendulum has recently swung so far in the anti-teacher direction, as the result of the “research shows” that there are huge differences between “good” and “bad” teachers, and that value-added teacher evaluations should be implemented in order to get rid of the “bad” ones.

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The Eliot K-8 School has expanded to two buildings in the historic North End, with grades 5-8 in large, airy classrooms on the first floor of a modern facility on Commercial Street. I started my visit here, then walked up Charter Street past Copp’s Hill Burying Ground to the old brick building that houses Kindergarten through Grade 4 and specialty classes.

Upper School Lead Teacher David Glinner introduced me to his colleagues and showed me around. A whole-school meeting begins each day with the Pledge of Allegiance and announcements. I visited during the first full week of the school year and students were all taking the BPS Predictive Tests in English/Language Arts. Luckily math, science, and social studies classes were in session so I was able to take some learning photos! In an 8th grade science class, students were working in groups of four at tall tables – observing and taking notes on a “mystery mixture” before adding water to see how it might react. Seventh grade students were using their social studies textbooks to practice reading physical maps.

At the lower school building, children spend the first 90 minutes of every day focused on literacy. In the primary grades children were listening to stories, playing word games, and looking at books. It was nice to see students engaged with self-selected “real books” instead of the ubiquitous Reading Street texts that guide literacy instruction in most BPS schools. In one fourth grade classroom, students were sharing their writing. During Italian class, young children were playing a guessing game to learn how to name the colors. I especially enjoyed watching Theater Arts teacher Sean Murphy lead a group of kindergarteners in a lively holding-hands song and dance around the room – his enthusiasm was contagious!

With “Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe and Be Kind” as the school’s guiding principles, the Eliot is providing a warm and welcoming environment for student learning in one of Boston’s most historic neighborhoods. Please invite me to visit YOUR school this year!

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**Eliot K-8 School**

**A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.**

We were doing Word Study. We’re learning how to match words that have the same ending sound, like man and can, or sad and mad. We’ve learned that every word needs to have a vowel and a consonant in it. We’re also learning how to sketch people to make them look real.

Ismail Ibrahim & Hake McGivern, Grade 1

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**Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed. D.**

Amika45@comcast.net

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We were taking notes on an experiment in science class. We’ve set up our notebooks and we’re learning about how different substances interact with one another.

Miguel Cabrera de Jesus & Robert Catrone, Grade 8

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We were reading books. They are so fun because they have so many pictures in them. In the story of the Golden Fleece, the boat was made of oak that could talk! We’re looking forward to learning Italian this year.

Gia Spagnuolo & Sloan Hayden, Grade 1

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We were adding water to a mystery mixture to find out the reaction. We learned that baking soda made it sticky, and citric acid bubbled. We enjoy science and hope we’ll do more fun projects because we learn a lot from them!

Sheyla Palacios & Dionna Sturkey, Grade 8

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We were reading my book and then writing it down in my reading log. Our teacher Ms. Brown told us that keeping a reading log is one of the best ways to become a better reader. In math we are learning about rounding numbers to the nearest tens or hundreds.

Mira Yu, Grade 3

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We were looking at and sharing our favorite books from home. We’re learning how to read.

Erika Ruiz & finesa Rohlfing, Grade 1

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Ismail Ibrahim & Hake McGivern, Grade 1

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We were reading Tunes for Bears to Dance To, by Robert Cormier, after taking a test in ELA. I’ve learned that the stages of a plot include rising action, a climax, falling action, and the resolution.

Joseph Bova, Grade 6

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My teacher, Ms. DiSarcina, is explaining how the homework system works. This year I’m learning how to add decimals. We’re also learning about the History of Boston.

Omaro Isaacs, Grade 5

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