Negotiations: What Went Wrong?

By Richard Stutman, BTU President

At the end came down to a few items, in particular how much or how little—the school department values our teaching. It is as simple as that.

School District Disrespects Us By Devouring Our Time

The school department insisted that our members work an additional 45 minutes per day instructing our students for a daily sum of $13.89. The feeling of our negotiating team unanimously was that if we agreed to this proposal our members, already working a long school day, would rightly resent that decision and see it forever as a mistake. After all, our members have busy lives and to ask them to give up an additional 45 minutes per day for an insulting sum of money that devalues their worth would set a very bad precedent as well as leave a bad taste. So we walked away from the offer.

That wasn’t the only issue. The pay raises the district offered, too, were inadequate. The district offered 0% effective 9/1/2010, 1.25% on 9/1/2011, 1.75% on 9/1/2012, 2.5% on 9/1/2013, and 2.5% on 9/1/2014. We agreed on the proposed increases for the last two years. On the first three, we asked for a 1.5% in year 1, a 2.5% in year 2, and a 2.5% in year 3 provided we also got paid at the $41.03 contractual hourly rate. At the end, we couldn’t get the department to budge. Neither would we. Frankly, we were insulted that the department would value our professional instruction time at $18.51 per hour. And that is ‘not interested.’

We didn’t particularly care for the sudden extension and we offered as a compromise a schedule at 45 minutes, four days per week, with one day at regular dismissal—but still with compensation at the going rate. This didn’t work and the department rejected both the schedule proposal and the compensation. We went back and forth, but at the end, we couldn’t get the department to budge. Neither would we. Frankly, we were insulted that the department would value our professional instructional time at $18.51 per hour. And negotiations broke down.

School Department Spin on TIF Grant

Unfortunately, so did, too, negotiations on the TIF grant, as it had to be part of the entire package. The $9.4M TIF grant was ready to be agreed to provided it could be packaged together with the Master Bargain. But as the Master Bargain is apart, so, too, did the TIF Grant. This is regrettable, but the school department’s ‘spin’ (‘We really tried to do this, but the Union held us back’) on this is reprehensible. The school district doesth protest too much, we think.

The grant would have been a good addition to our Turnaround Program, everything else being said. But it would give a more complete picture.

School District SAT on TIF Grant for 16 Months Wasting Valuable Time

The district knew it was getting the grant in September 2010 and SAT on it for 16 months. When the state upgraded the district for not fulfilling its reporting obligation, it formally acted, a full 16 months AFTER it first knew it had to negotiate with the union. Its first proposal to us contained a boondoggle of administrative costs and overhead, roughly 38% of the total proposed expenditure of $9.4M included in the boondoggle were the hiring of mega consultants, contractors, support staff, travel expenses, and $3.3 Million in the hiring of data analysts and data team support. C’mon now. There’s no excuse to spend 14% of this budget—$1.23 Million—on the hiring and training of the people to interpret data that is readily available! Nonetheless, we wanted to settle this as part of the contract so we told the district to curb its administrative overhead and spend the rest on the schools to the largest extent possible. The district then made the effort—a little late—but unfortunately did not make the same effort to settle our contract.

School Department Twists Union’s Objectives

Finally, a radio station called to tell me that the superintendent was saying that all we wanted to do was talk about money, more money. Nothing for the kids. Yes, we have heard that many times. This is an unfortunate.

On March 8 we submitted a 22-page comprehensive proposal to the school department. Our proposal is all encompassing and contains many items of interest directly tied to improving the children’s education. Let me please list a few of these items to give you a taste of how very wrong and purposely misleading the superintendent is.

2 – an item about working with universities to provide tutoring program. The BTU offered to pay for the mentoring of the tutors.

3 – an item to establish a reading task force.

4 – an item to shore up library services in our schools and budget for improved library and media resources.

11 – lower class size by 1 in grades 6 and 9.

F 12 – improving technology for students.

F 12 – allowing BTU members to enroll their children and foster children in their own schools.

This item was ultimately agreed to by the school district and would have become part of the Contract that we settled in full.

F 12 – an item to allow the BTU to and the BPS to jointly run a post-high school mentoring program with Bunker Hill and Roxbury Community colleges to provide follow up to recent graduates.

F 14 – the hiring of social workers to allow for the establishment of a safety net for our children in a number of schools.

These are but a few of the many items we have proposed to improve our schools. None of those items enriches any of our members and each would help our system. So what was the department’s response? It rejected each and every one of these items (except as noted above). The department wants it both ways. On the one hand, it wants to criticize us for being about ‘money, money, money.’ But as soon as we mention a non-money item that is meant to improve our schools the district tells us that our proposal is out of bounds and that is ‘not interested.’

(Incidentally, until this past weekend, our negotiating teams had met roughly 50 times at an average of perhaps 5 hours per session. Question: How many of those hours were spent talking about ‘money, money, money, money?’ Put another way, for how many hours did we talk about the BTU’s salary proposal? Answer: If you said ‘two’, you would be correct. In 22 months, we spent a total of two hours on salary. So much for ‘money, money, money.’)

(continued on page 3)
Republicans scream that the Democrats are trying to create class war. Demo- crats reply, “Oh, for the old days when we didn’t set the record straight. Republicans: It is a class war. And IT’s YOUR class war. In New Democracy, it’s not my war, it’s not my class. And YOU aren’t helping!”

I did a little research during one of the 6 hour caucuses that Boston School Department’s crick neck negotiating team routinely took during our almost 2 years of trying to reach an agreement on a fair contract. I called Local 867 of the International Broth- erhood of Teamsters, the highly respected refinery workers of the ConocoPhillips Bayway Refinery in Linden, New Jersey. Back in the day it used to be called the Standard Oil Bayway Refinery and it’s where my father, a pipefitter, worked for overseas. The highest concentration of wage settlements were in major unions. The Fed policy was to break organized labor.

Today’s policies continue along the same vein. After 2008 banks stopped lending. Demands to pay down debt take precedence, growth is slow. Economist John Maynard Keynes, whose policies helped steer the worst of the last Great Depression, said in 1930’s, “the object of credit restriction...is to withdraw from employers the financial means to employ labor at the existing level of wages and prices. The policy can only attain its end by intensifying unemployment without reducing wages. This class war is being waged against not simply by the Boston School Depart- ment. In a recent article in Monthly Review entitled Sado-Monetarism: The Role of the Federal Reserve System in Keeping Down Wages, econonmist professor Michael Perelman writes a study conducted by economist Edwin Dickens, Dickens analyzed minutes from Federal Reserve meetings, and found that since the inflation target, Fed policy has always been to tighten money supply when major union contracts were to be negotiated, forcing employers to be less generous. Former Fed Chair- man Paul Volcker used to carry around a card which told him what current wage settlements were in major unions. The Fed was determined to break organized labor.

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My father’s son did go to college and this year there will be 17 scholarships in the amount of $1,000 awarded to grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews of RTC members. This is another distortion. The media as burnt-out, lazy, unfamiliar with the media as burnt-out, lazy, unfamiliar with new methodologies, and too old to relate well to the younger generation. These are organizations are enthusiastic, energetic, eager, and committed. The message coming from the mass media is that younger teachers could lose their posi- tions for “veteran teachers.” Experience is considered a deterrent to keeping younger teachers in classrooms; therefore, these rights for teachers must be eliminated.

In Massachusetts an attack on teach- ers’ seniority rights is currently being spearheaded by Stand for Children’s major donors, including Bain Capital and the Walton Family Foundation (Wal-Mart), to realize that what it “stands for is Big Business and a political agenda that like that to be able to say, “you’re fired,” without worrying about such things as bad teachers; on the contrary, these rights are a protection for good teachers.

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Seniority is a protection against capricious and unfair decisions on the part of the principal and further, these rights act as a barrier to prevent age discrimination, racial bias, other forms of prejudice. Seniority rights prevent school districts from firing higher paid teachers in order to replace them with teachers on the lower end of the scale. Seniority allows experienced teachers to advocate for the children and to have a voice in educational decisions; and, when necessary, to disagree with a principal or superintendent or school com- mittee member without fear of retribution or job loss.

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When do new teachers sign up, when can we change our plans, what happens if someone gets laid off and rehired or is returning from an extended leave?... }

City of Boston Employees join health plans by contacting the Health Benefits and Insurance Division (Group Insurance) located on the 8th floor, 100 Cambridge St., Boston. Call 617-635-4570. New hires have 60 calendar days from the time they are hired in order to sign up for health insurance. If you are a professional or permanent teacher who was laid off and then is recalled/rehired, you also must contact the Group Insurance Office within 60 days of being rehired from lay off in order to reenroll. Some people have assumed that because they have their job back, the insurance is automatically reinstated – this is not the case. These deadlines are hard and fast.

Open enrollment is the window of time when you can change your type of health insurance plan, or sign up for the first time if you’ve missed another deadline. This period is held annually for 5 weeks in April and the first week of May. Those wanting to partake in open enrollment must contact the Group Health Insurance Office at City Hall. This year open enrollment will be held from April 4 – May 9, 2011. There will be a Health Seminar held at the BTU on April 10 from 4 – 6.

If a teacher takes a leave of absence and decides to return to teaching during their leave, they must sign up to reinstate their health insurance during the Spring open-enrollment period prior to their return to the Fall. The individual will have to pay premiums out of pocket beginning on July 1 through September 1 after which time; deductions will be taken from their paychecks. Their insurance will take effect July 1 as a result. During the year

Open enrollment

Commentary: Brigid Byrne-Rowlings

What’s A Half Hour?

What’s another half hour? That is the question I’ve asked myself as our contract negotiations have dragged on and on. While I’ve agreed with the Boston Teachers Union’s position on developing a careful process for introducing a new teacher evaluation process and a cohesive plan for using any extended school day time, I just can’t agree on why extending the school day an extra half hour without extra compensation was that kind of a deal.

After all, I’d appreciate an extra half hour a day, if it meant that I’d get a few more minutes added on to the current 47 minute class periods I currently teach. And, I already work so many extra hours I don’t get compensated for – as a Model UN advisor, a volunteer assistant swim coach, a parent phone caller, and a lesson planner – what is one more half an hour on top of all of that?

Then, last week, the BTU rolled out its “Open ‘Til 6” campaign. What that half hour time truly is hit me hard. In the advertisement that the BTU placed in newspapers and on billboards listing what an extra half hour a day means financially to a variety of professions, I noticed that to an engineer, an extra half hour means $6,245.00 per year. I chopped me cold, because my husband is an engineer.

What would my reaction be if I were home and I told my be-ribboned in red to work an extra half hour a day with no extra compensation? Would I be happy to learn that extra half hour that he’d be away from home would cost my family over six thousand dollars?

This line of thinking led me to the realization that my family members are a whole lot more even than our plans. While we eagerly anticipate this new person who will make us a family of three, we also realize that our new addition will require a time and financial commitment that we’ve done our best to prepare for given our current circumstances.

However, working an extra half an hour a day will mean an extra half hour my son or daughter will spend in day care each day. That represents 90 extra hours a school year my child will spend in someone else’s care, and not my own. Then, there is the cost associated with those 90 extra hours, I will need to pay a day care provider for them, yet will not be myself be paid for working them.

Having done this math, I realized how complaisant I’d become in giving away my time to the Boston Public Schools! Rationa"lizing the time I give to Model UN and the Boston Latin Academy Swim Team by thinking about the benefits students receive by participating in these activities, I then forget about the cost, both financial and in terms of quality of life, to me and my family.

I’ve now decided that yet another un compensated half an hour to where I have to draw the line. For that reason, I now fully support the “Open ‘Til 6” campaign, and will proudly wear my stickers and solidarity calls until the other side of the negotiating table realizes, I as have, how valuable my time truly is. (Brigid Byrne-Rowlings teaches Seventh Grade History at the Boston Latin Academy.)
Commentary: Judith A. Lyons

I Am A Teacher

I am a teacher. I love the way it sounds, Teacher, however in light of the more recent trend towards teacher bullying, I find that the word teacher creates a bitter feeling of disillusionment, an unknown and uncomfortable feeling that I chillingly want to erase, even at the cost of dropping teacher from my name. It is a conflict that I fear many of my peers also experience, distancing ourselves from our profession and letting go of the idealism that once drove us to pursue our vocation.

Teaching is just that, a vocation, your pharma, something that one is meant to do. Yet, today, one wonders how much longer we can tolerate the empty, dark feelings of disappointment and confusion as to what has become of us.

To simply say that teachers are devalued today’s culture extracts from the serious consequence of a devalued workforce. We experience moments of anger, injustice and mystification as to how we arrived in the lowest caste in the order of education. To understand this dichotomy, to love and despise your calling, forces one to dig deep into the politics of education. The true meaning of teacher has become lost in the rhetoric of a struggling bureaucracy. The “system” is failing our children and the teacher often carries the burden of blame.

The structure inherent in the education system forces the teachers to examine their rank and cling to what once was an honorable profession. The rhetoric of education calls for accountability; however in many schools today, only the teachers are held accountable. Educators all must be held to a standard of accountability. Tools of evaluation are often used to repress individuals who question methods and decisions that are counterproductive to “focusing on children.” Instead of using the evaluation tool to help improve the practice of teaching, it has become a vehicle to punish and dismiss individuals whose politics and methodology do not align with current teaching trends or the decisions of insecure and dictatorial managers.

An English Language Arts teacher brings a grammar book from home to her students and is chastised because “grammar is not part of the canned curriculum.” The teacher fervently believes that her students need grammar, however

Books for South Africa

O n a beautiful sunny Wednesday afternoon, March 7th, BPS teachers and other volunteers loaded a 40’ container with 575 boxes of school supplies for schools in South Africa and Zambia. Collected by Books for South Africa (BFSA), the shipment includes over 20,000 quality donated books and 100 boxes of educational materials and athletic equipment for under-resourced areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these books will be translated into Zulu for young children. The BFSA project, organized by retired Madison Park teacher Judith Baker, has been in existence for 10 years to support literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Most of the books and educational materials in this shipment will go to the Molatedi School in Guateng Province, South Africa. The remainder of the books will go to the Real Beyond Zambia project, which runs after school reading clubs in Lusaka, Zambia.

Many people in BPS have helped with this project—collecting, sorting and packing boxes, loading the containers, and helping raise funds to buy new African books. They include Kenneth Still, BPS Athletic Director; Bill Fitzgerald, Assistant AD; Bethany Wood, BPS Director of Service Learning; retired teachers Bernie Diamond [McCormick Middle], Gail Sarofeen [West Roxbury High], Steve Grace [Madison Park], Amika Kemmler-Ernst [New Teacher Developer], OJ Lansana [Latin Academy], and Maureen Gannon; and many working teachers such as Ingrid Tanda [Mather Elementary] and Mike Viggiano [Madison Park].

Over the past several years Boston teachers have volunteered at these and other schools in South Africa and hopefully, more will do so in the future. You might also check out the Books for South Africa website and make a small donation to help with transport to the schools—transport to the port is paid for, but it costs another $3000 to ship the container to the Ladysmith area. We also use donations to buy books in Zulu or other local languages for the schools. Contact Bethany Wood if you, your students, and/or your school are interested in supporting these efforts.

(Submitted by Amika Kemmler-Ernst and Judith Baker)
On March 10th forty people gathered to celebrate the first Boston Teachers Union Women’s Rights Breakfast. BTU members were joined by family and friends to mark this important occasion. This event could not have been more timely. BTU member Dana Royster Buefort pointed out that the BTU was wounded us of the long history of women fighting for our rights, referencing Sojourner Truth who is well known for her “Aint I A Woman” speech.

Today this fight continues. As Tom Gosselin, President of AFT MA noted, in the past few months as we have watched presidential candidates trying to outdo each other as they attack the rights of women. We have witnessed what has been called a stepped up War on Women. This was exemplified by the attempt in the Senate to pass the Blunt Amendment.

Dana also spoke about the negative messages projected television shows like Toddlers to Tiaras and Basketball Wives — girls and women are supposed to be beautiful, sexy and the object of men’s attention. Her conclusion was simply stated as she quoted James Joplin: “Don’t compromise yourself. You are all you’ve got.”

Sherry Pedone, who worked tirelessly to make her vision of a Women’s Rights Committee in the BTU a reality, opened the event. She stressed the important goals of establishing this as a sustainable committee within the BTU, a committee that joins with others to focus on women’s issues and concerns. Sherry had help to develop her plans for the Women’s Rights Committee when she attended a weekend training last June run by WILD (Women’s Institute for Leadership Development).

Ayanna Pressley arrived at the breakfast prepared to give the keynote address. She was both surprised and honored when Sherry announced that she was being honored as the first recipient of an award given to a person who has demonstrated outstanding service to women in the Greater Boston Area. Ayanna is the first African American women to serve on the Boston City Council, topping the ticket in her recent reelection. Ayanna is well known as a champion of women’s rights in Boston. She formed and chairs the Committee on Women and Healthy Communities. As Angela Cristiani pointed out when introducing Ayanna, she exemplifies a person of character because she does what’s right when nobody is looking.

Ayanna is aware of the negative messages sent out in some popular music and on television. She has a different message. Ayanna spoke passionately about women and girls focusing on their own value and reaching their potential. Girls avoiding teen pregnancy. Girls and women who are free from the fear of violence including sexual assault. Girls finding a meaningful education. Young women graduating from school. Ayanna acknowledged the importance of teachers who help to mold our students, teach values, provide skills and knowledge and act as role models and mentors.

Sherry concluded this wonderful event by inviting everyone attending to be active in the fight for women’s rights, join the BTU Women’s Right Committee, and join us next year for what will be the 2nd Annual Women’s Rights Breakfast.

For more information on the BTU Women’s Rights Committee contact Sherry Pedone at: For more information on WILD contact Emily Hardt at: www.wildlabor.org (617-426-0520)

In early March the Senate rejected the Blunt Amendment in a very close 51 to 48 vote. This amendment was an effort to expand exemptions to health care insurance mandated nationally. It would have allowed any employer to exclude coverage for any medical need they did not personally believe in, including birth control. The vote was largely on party lines, with our Senator Scott Brown voting in favor of the amendment. If he, or anyone else voting for this amendment, doesn’t believe in birth control than he doesn’t have to use it. But leave this important decision up to every individual and not their employer.

Some of the committee members with Ayanna Pressley L-R Kate Okoye, Margie Crosby, Brenda Chaney, Angela Cristiani, Ayanna Pressley, Sherry Pedone, Gayle Marrow, Dana Royster Buefort

Dana Royster Buefort addresses the Women’s Rights Committee.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) African American Abolitionist and Women’s Rights Activist

Speech: Ain’t I A Woman? Delivered at the 1851 Women’s Convention, Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that twist the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? Look at my arm! That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? Then they talk about this thing in the head; what’s that they call it? [member of audience whispers, “intellect”] That’s it, honey. What’s that to do with women’s rights or negroes’ rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full? Then that little man in black there, he says women can’t have as much rights as men, cause Christ wasn’t a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them. Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain’t got nothing more to say.
AFT President Randi Weingarten Attends Educational-Legislative Issues Seminar

By Michael J. Maguire

On March 24, 2012, AFT president Randi Weingarten gave a passionate, honest, and sometimes uncomfortable speech. Weingarten began by pointing out the irony that Maryland, Massachusetts, and Minnesota have some of the highest educational scores in the nation yet are battleground states in the new wave of education reform.

“In 1974, 36% of the workforce was union. In 2007 it was down to 8%, and I suspect that it may be as low as 6%” the health insurance than a non-union college graduate.”

Weingarten went on to describe the 4Ds used by our detractors to undermine our efforts:

Divide, Stand For Children, Children First, and similar organizations are attempting to paint unions as “for teachers” and themselves as “for children.”

Delegate fake. Waiting for Superman was filmed primarily to plant the idea that unionized teachers care little for children and education. Weingarten pointed out that the film was released at the start of the 10-11 school year to inject chaos at the precise time teachers need to establish order in the classroom.

Dehumanize. Randi Weingarten herself was a target of an ad hominem attack in Waiting for Superman. On March 29, the Boston Herald’s Margery Eagan likewise wrote disparagingly about Richard Stutman. The old adage holds true, if you can’t discredit the message, discredit the messenger.

Defund. 46 out of 50 states have defunded education in their recent budgets. Simply put, Weingarten stated that certain people want to privatize education because they see educational budgets as their pot of gold.

Furthermore, Weingarten pointed out that funding educational nations have not cut their education budgets the way the US has. Moreover, Japan, even after suffering last year’s disastrous earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown, has not slashed its education budget.

The importance of community

Weingarten’s major theme was re-connecting labor with the broader community. “The world has changed so much that labor no longer represents the community,” warned Weingarten. “As a result, we have average workers asking themselves, ‘Why do they hate us? I no longer have? The people in the community do not believe that the unions’ goals are the same as theirs.”

Stating that there is great unrest in the country, Randi observed that the “Occupy Wall Street movement and the Tea Party reflect the same anger towards our problems but offer different prescriptions.” Weingarten urged us to reconnect with the community as soon as possible.

“We have always done the right thing,” she added on a serious note. “We ought to defend due process, but what do we do when someone is doing a terrible job?”

Weingarten urged us in our locals to become actively involved in the teacher evaluation process. If we don’t, someone else will, she warned.

“They go after seniority because they think it is the only way (to remove bad teachers). They do this because they don’t trust us.” It’s past time we earned back the people’s trust.

Reconnecting McDowell

McDowell, West Virginia is the 8th-poorest county in America. It had been under state control for the past 10 years. The population has plummeted from 100,000 to 30,000 due primarily to the mechanization of the coal mines and a massive flood in 2002.

McDowell has 70% unemployment and has arguably the highest drug usage in the nation (primarily due to oxycodone). Both housing and transportation are in bad shape in McDowell. Boredom plagues the youth who lament that there is nothing to do.

The American Federation of Teachers is the largest union in the state. Former WV first lady Gayle Manchin asked The AFT to take the leading role in a partnership over 40 organizations whose goal is to revitalize McDowell County.

Although the program is only a few months old, West Virginia governor Earl Ray Tomlin recently stated, “The union was a godsend in helping McDowell.”

Weingarten hopes that success in McDowell will spark a fire of interest in unions.

Call to action

As mentioned earlier, president Weingarten wants us to become more involved in our communities. She pointed to the success the AFT had in Florida in turning back a bill favorable to charter schools. Florida parents’ groups supported the AFT against the charter school legislation because the parents saw the union as a partner in their community.

On the topic of student test score, Weingarten said, “We need to embrace test scores as part of our evaluation tools.” By way of explanation, Weingarten asked, “Have we taught it? Have they learned it?”

“Now, we are not 100% responsible for a child’s learning, but we are partly,” she pointed out. “Stand For Children has nothing to do with children, it is about union busting in the most densely state in the country. I see us getting out of this when we make common cause with the community.”

Weingarten called for a two major overhauls in teacher evaluations. First, evaluations ought to be a statewide issue. Second, evaluations ought to contain checks and balances.

In Massachusetts we shall have a new statewide evaluation instrument. As for the checks and balances, Weingarten envisions three parts: test scores, management oversight, and peer review. With the peer review, Weingarten hopes to mitigate cynicism by management. Furthermore, asserts the national president, “we know what good teaching is.”
Educational leaders from across Massachusetts listen to AFT President Randi Weingarten speak at the BTU Hall.

Timo Phillip of the Bright High School

John Glynn of the McCormack Middle School

The McKinley South End Academy Shows Off Its BTUnity!
A Tribute to Paraprofessionals:  
26th Annual Statewide Conference • March 31, 2012

By Jenna Fitzgerald  
Paraprofessional/Substitute Teacher Field Rep

The twenty-sixth annual AFT-MA/BTU Paraprofessional Statewide Conference was held at the BTU on Saturday, March 31, 2012. The paraprofessional Council arrived very early to set up for the day. The little red wagon was so full of folders for registration that we could barely pull it. At the one hundred thirty-eight paras registered, they were very happy and everyone would receive a gift at lunchtime and also a raffle would be held for the bigger prizes. The mood brightened and there was a sense of “I’m glad I made the effort to attend this conference, as it is quite a tribute.”

Now it was time for the coffee, bagels and camaraderie. Everyone gathered together for the Plenary Session, which began at 9:00 AM. Introductions were in order, and the day began. We usually introduce the President of the Boston Teachers Union first and go on from there, but President Richard Stutman was absent due to the fact that he was negotiating for our contract and could not join us for the day. The negotiation team also included the rest of the BTU staff: Pat Connolly, our Vice President; Charles Johnson, Secretary/Paul Masoner, Michael McLaughlin, Elementary Field Rep; and Caren Carew, Secondary Field Rep. We understood their priority and wished them well. Also joining us in the Hall was Angela J. Cristiani, Political Director and Executive Board member.

Our Paraprofessionals from Lowell and Lynn joined us for our tribute to paras, and we were so pleased to have them there. They never miss a conference. Next we introduced our Paraprofessional Council, followed by President Tom Gosnell from AFT Massachusetts, and our guest speaker from Detroit, President Ruby Newbold. We were ready to carry on.

The first speaker for the day was Thomas Gosnell. Tom always gets the paras going with his stories, especially Red Sox stories, but we were shocked! No Red Sox this year. He did speak of the memory of how many years he has been attending the Para Conferences, and how he and I were the only ones from this group who were there in 1979. He then proceeded to present me with a new hat. It was a pink baseball cap with a letter B on the front. This brought loud cheers from the crowd.

Next on the agenda was the wonderful choral group from the Charles Sumner School. Under the direction of Louie Bello, the girls entertained us with some beautiful music. We could have listened for hours, but time would not permit. Maybe next year! Now the Guest speaker, Ruby Newbold, the President of the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees, and Chairperson, AFT/PSRP Program and Policy Council. Ruby gave us a look at what is going on in Detroit and it doesn’t look good. She first stated how the union lost the right to have dues deductions from the paycheck. This is devastating to any union. Detroit schools also reduced salaries by 10% and raised Health & Welfare by 10%. Times have changed – not one level PPC Leader from the different schools she had been associated with and called on them to give their opinion of what they had remembered from their association with Dr. Brown. Each one gave a glowing report. I thought that was quite brave in front of this large audience. Dr. Brown, Entrepreneur, Author and Administrator carries many hats and shared wonderful morning of fun, motivation and challenges for all the paraprofessionals. They could not get enough. I’m sure everyone went home with fitness on their mind and a determination to do better.

It was time to break for lunch after our strenuous workout dancing with Dr. Brown, who said that we owe ourselves that delicious “low calorie” lasagne.

During lunch break we had the paras turn in the surveys and they received their prize: A tee shirt that states, “I am a paraprofessional by choice.” I hope they wear it with pride! I must say that the survey idea was a good one, because we had a lot of input from the parapros. Dr. Carol Brown was mentioned over and over as the best workshop we have had in a long time. And one thing for sure is that we will start the Conference next year at 9:30 instead of 8:30. You see, we listen to what you have to say. We will also take into consideration all of your remarks.

Everyone was happy and enjoying the conversations with lunch. After lunch the announcement was made that we would now draw names for all the gifts that the Paraprofessional Council had acquired for the drawings. The Paraprofessional Council worked very diligently to make sure there would be many prizes to be raffled off at the Conference. I feel I want to give personally say a great big thank you to all the vendors who made this possible: Venezia Restaurant in Dorchester; El Sarape Mexican Restaurant at Weymouth Landing; Eco Trattoria Restaurant, 1167 Main St, Weymouth, Red Roof Inn VIP Pass for one night’s stay; Cathay Pacific cover charge tickets; the 99 Restaurant at Weymouth Landing; Ecco Tratoria Restaurant, 1167 Main St, Weymouth, Shaw’s, Target, Avon Basket, Hannaford’s, and last but not least, Lambert’s.

We want to thank everyone who attended this conference, and we hope to see you next year!
I had the pleasure of visiting the Roosevelt K-8 School this month. Located in Hyde Park, it is surrounded by single-family homes at the southern edge of the city. Expansion to K-8 a few years ago, and 400+ students, led to use of the former Hemenway building as a “lower campus” for K1-Grade 3 classes.

I started my visit at the “upper campus” (grades 2-8) where many classes were engaged in math and science activities. There were at least two adults in every classroom that I visited, which was nice to see. Cathy Lyon’s second grade had several adults available to give students 1:1 attention during a literacy period!

A short drive away, the primary building feels like a mini Early Learning Center with its colorful playground at the entrance. I loved visiting music teacher Sharon Hamel’s K1 class... she greeted each and every student by name with a lilting “hello” accompanied by a furry stuffed bee, who got lots of hugs from the children. After greetings, she had students marching around the room to a lively drumbeat, changing their movement to match the beat: two beats is “BROWN BEAR” and 4 beats is “caterpillar”—lighter and faster. Integrating arts and language, these four year olds were learning syllables with their music! In Sharon Robinson-Byrd’s first grade class down the hall, students were counting syllables to write original haiku poems about fantastical sea creatures.

While primary teachers love their little building and the “family feeling” it creates, it’s hard to build a sense of community across buildings. A middle school teacher told me how much respect she feels for her colleagues, and praised principal Emily Glasgow for “challenging me in my teaching practice.” Changes and challenges are everywhere in BPS these days; the Roosevelt seems to be meeting them with a professional spirit that would be the envy of any school.
current teaching trends to abandon formal grammar lessons imposes restrictions on teachers who deviate from the current methodologies.

A major flaw in the organizational structure of many schools is the top down management processes of insecure and inexperienced administrators. There are countless stories from teachers whose careers have been demeaned and destroyed because they challenged the methodologies and decisions of their supervisors. Teachers operate daily under a veil of fear and thus retreat into their classrooms, isolated and removed from the community of their peers.

Punitive methods of control and manipulation do not inspire excellence. Instead, knowledge and hope are dismissed from the very nature of their profession. They retreat and become more disenchanted daily. Eventually, they are silenced and become robotic because it is safe. Our educational leadership does not inspire, but creates an environment that breeds mediocrity and mistrust. It is time to expand the parameters of accountability to all of the players on the chessboard. It is time to level the playing field.

As a just and fair society, all citizens are expected to obey the laws of community and culture. In the culture of education, only teachers are expected to follow the norms set by individuals who do not understand the true nature of teaching.

To the administrators who have lived in a classroom: shame on you for forgetting the fundamental rules of education.

In hundreds of classrooms, rules or expectations of acceptable behavior are not consistently applied.

Respect is generally found at the top of the list. We understand that a culture of mutual respect is critical for engagement and creativity. We ask our students to respect our work because we know that is a necessary ingredient in a classroom culture that is caring and motivational. How do we teach the most difficult and painful questions. How does one TEACH, how does one honor the act of TEACHING when the honor of our profession has been denigrated and devalued?

Every day we enter our building and zip up our armor, asking our higher power for guidance, patience and compassion. I want to work with our colleagues, our students and our community.

I want to strengthen and challenge the minds of our youth, however I fear that heart has disappeared. We feel powerless because our opinions and ideas are dismissed and silenced. We feel powerless because the threat of eviction from our classrooms or cowardly acts to punish, are certain to occur. Sometimes we step up to the plate, fully aware that there will be a price to pay, yet passionate enough to take that chance. Despite the rhetoric of educational jargon, such as shared decision making and school based management, we are not included in the politics of education. We are held to standards that are reserved only for those who TEACH. We are teachers, devalued, often belittled, underpaid, ignored and devoid of the dignity and honor that our calling demands.

We can no longer ask for respect from our leaders. We must demand respect!

We must demand that the buildion of mutual respect be built into every school culture, at all levels. Until we reclaim dignity and respect, we will continue to be the scapegoat for the failure of education.

We will continue to be the victims of insecure and inexperienced leadership or political agendas that are far removed from the reality of our environment and from the lives of our students.

There is power through unity; yet, often we are forced to change in order because we are afraid that we will be the next casualties. So we go into our classroom, close the door and retreat into the confines of our established islands of safety, avoiding opportunities to connect with our colleagues, our students and our community.

We are teachers, I am a teacher...and the words become more and more distant.

(Continued from page 4)
Boston Public Schools Science Fair Participants Show Extraordinary Skill

By Ruth M. O’Day

Science education is alive and well in our city schools. This is evidenced by the huge numbers of students who participate in school and district science fairs. Every year, students are the focus of this annual celebration of achievements in the sciences. They display their projects at the Boston Public Schools Science Fair Committee’s annual Spring Event in the Cabot Cage at Northeastern University on a beautiful Saturday afternoon in March. Three hundred and thirty-two science projects and 260 science fair judges were showcased in the 30th annual Boston Public Schools Science Fair. They were joined by 91 distinguished volunteer judges from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, and the Boston University School of Medicine.

Voting in the BTU

Turnout and participation in the BTU’s biannual elections have been a concern and challenge for many teachers. Here are some possible statements that could apply to any BTU leader:

- I vote regularly in the BTU elections.
- I vote in the BTU elections because I would like to be more involved in the union.
- I vote in the BTU elections because a number of past contributors and circle members want me to.
- I vote in the BTU elections because a number of past contributors and circle members have asked me to.

When you retire, you are no longer a member of the Union because you no longer pay dues. And, you are no longer a member of the Health and Welfare Fund, which means you no longer have dental coverage and eyeglass coverage. If you wish to continue your connection to the union, you can join the Retired Teachers Chapter (RTC). The dues will be taken from your retirement and will do the following:

- You must pay the dues to maintain your membership to know that the primary is COLA increase. Also, they request permission from the BTU Executive Board to circulate petitions for the Spring Business Meeting and Spring Luncheon. Michael McLaughlin attended the meeting and will keep Legislative Committee updated on retirement matters. Report was accepted.

Motion: To authorize the RTC Legislative Committee to circulate petitions on COLA at the Spring Business Meeting and Spring Luncheon. Motion passed.

Scholarship: Committee has been invited to a local sorority scholarship fair on March 3, but they are not able to attend. Report Accepted.

Data Processing: Martha Cotton and Paul Tucciarone are pleased with the progress of the committee and are making every effort to keep ahead of the data processes. Report was accepted.

Membership: We have 2,889 members. Report Accepted.

Old Business: None

New Business: Motion: To spend $100 to have the Serenaders of Stoughton perform at the Spring Business Meeting. Motion passed.

Michael McLaughlin from the Boston Retirement Board joined the board meeting. He brought information on COLA base and Local Option Legislation information. Motion to adjourn at 11:45 a.m. was passed.

Next Meeting: March 5, 2012.

RUTH M. O’DAY IS A RETIRED TEACHER.

Boston Public Schools Science Fair

Surveying Teacher Voices for Improving Professional Practices

(continued from page 10)

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Next Meeting: March 5, 2012.

RUTH M. O’DAY IS A RETIRED TEACHER.
On April 5th, more than 800 students from more than 50 Boston Public Schools crammed our three halls to compete in the first-ever citywide math competition. Students from around the city from grades 3 through 12 came to show off their math skills in the first-time citywide competition. The number of students exceeded by far the anticipated attendance leading to a few unavoidable delays in the event’s logistics.

Upwards of 75 teachers attended the event after working with their students in preparation for this event for the last few weeks. The topics covered in the exam included areas in math from arithmetic through algebra II and geometry. We thank our teachers for their hard work.

Mayor Thomas Menino and Superintendent Carol Johnson joined BTU President Richard Stutman in welcoming the students, who were both enthusiastic and excited to compete in the competition. All students who attended received ribbons and certificates of completion, signed by the mayor, the superintendent and the BTU president.

Twenty-five elementary schools competed. The scores of the top finishers are listed below by weighted averages. The first score in the team competition represents the average individual score. The second adds the value of the group problem total.

Warren Prescott ........................................ 8.54 + 4 = 12.54
Harvard Kent ............................................ 8.125 + 3.5 = 11.625
Rafael Hernandez ...................................... 7.4 + 4 = 11.4
Kilmer ........................................................... 7.75 + 3 = 10.75
Roosevelt ...................................................... 7.84 + 2.5 = 10.34

The highest performing elementary students were:
Amanda Chen .............................................. 24 points from the Harvard Kent
Alan Zhang ................................................ 23 points from the Warren Prescott
Cale Henning .............................................. 22 points from the Roosevelt
Ethan Liu .................................................... 22 points from the Warren Prescott
Talia Bode-Ward ...................................... 21 points from the Rafael Hernandez

Four teachers in particular are to be thanked for their help – Marisa Bober of West Roxbury HS, Michael Sheehan of South Boston, Ellen Latham of Umana, and Maura McDonough from the Harvard Kent. Each drafted problems for the event and helped in the organization. Many others helped immeasurably during the event, and we thank them. We also thank Linda Davenport and Sherry Sajdak from the Math Office, as well as Willeka Green also from the Math Office, who provided great assistance in the organization of this event.

This was a great event only hampered by its sudden popularity. Next time around it promises to be better organized. Outside of that, it was quite heartening to watch students be excited about an academic subject.

Thank you again to all who participated, and congratulations to our wonderful students. The Boston Teachers Union and its membership were proud to sponsor and underwrite this event.

BTU Sponsors First Ever Citywide Math Competition

by Richard Stutman

Photos by Angela J. Cristiani

Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, BTU President Richard Stutman and BPS Superintendent Carol Johnson congratulate the participant of the 1st Annual BPS-BTU Math Competition.

Over 800 competitors filled three halls at the BTU.

Roosevelt Warriors

Even though it was hard work, the participants had a great time.

BTU President Richard Stutman congratulates the Mighty Mathematicians on a job well done.