Empowering Literacy for Our Students

In response to "Failure to Educate" by Janice Yearwood, published in The Boston Globe November 8, 2010 by Jennifer Leisner

I agree with Ms. Yearwood that it is our job to help our students achieve not just a functional level of literacy, but an empowering and emancipatory one. Literacy is more than sounding out words, but it is also more than passively evaluating text. Each of us needs to push our students to ask tough questions of both texts and the world in a way that inspires them to take charge of their lives.

No matter our intentions, however, we become part of the system the moment we step foot into a class-room. If you believe that we are "churning out academically unprepared students," all of us need to examine our own role in reproducing mediocrity. Did we provide a challenging, relevant curriculum, or did we track students by denying them access to advanced classes? If we cannot justify our actions, then we are working in collusion with that system. The fact that students begged you to attend graduation proves that you are not just a victim of the system, but also a victor.

It is easy from the vantage point of AP/12th grade English to claim that others didn't do their jobs, that we never read their homework or taught them how to write a sentence. Over 4,000 Boston teachers wake up every morning and give students their best. We buy our own materials, sacrifice mornings and give students their best.

For years seven or eight already. There really is less money, to be sure, this time around, but that's only half the equation. It isn't enough to say, "there is no money." Why is there no money? And when will there be sufficient funds for our schools? Let's take a quick look.

Why are there insufficient funds to run our schools? For one thing, in this current school year, approximately $60 million in state education aid will leave our school system and go straight to charter schools that accept students who live in Boston. That's a lot of money. Many people, by and large charter school proponents, feel that is quite acceptable for the funds to leave the city to educate any student who resides in Boston.

After all, the theory goes, these students were formerly Boston public school students, they have now left the district and have chosen charter schools. The costs for educating these students in the BPS ought to be proportionately less, now that they've left our public schools. The city's schools ought to receive less education money from the state. In theory anyway this makes some sense. The problem is, many of the students who cost us $60 million in tuitions that is taken from the BPS budget have never been Boston Public School students.

A Look at a Few oft-Told Distortions and Half-Truths About Charters, Funding, and the City's Resources

By Richard Stutman

If you repeat something often enough, the saying goes, people may start to believe it. A corollary to that may be, if you don't know how to spell something, spell it loudly—people may think you really do know to spell it. We are beset by truths and falsehoods in today's world, nowhere so much than in the public education sector. Here are a few, all the more notable because they are repeated quite often—and very loudly.

"Charter schools do a better job that public schools." Yes, we hear that all the time: Charters top traditional schools. Well, in some ways they do, most certainly. They definitely do a better job of promoting themselves. And they certainly do a better job of recruiting students. In fact, one small local charter school employs two and one half full time recruitment specialists. But when it comes to providing an education to all students—well, charters do a so-so job, no matter what their advocates say. The most significant nationwide study done to date, the CREDO study from Stanford (http://credo.stanford.edu/REPORTS/MULTIPLE_CHOICE_EXECUTIVESUMMARY.pdf), showed that across 16 states representing fully 70% of the U.S. students enrolled in charters, charters did a fair to poor job. About half of the students received no academic advantage by attending charter schools. 34% did worse, and 17% did better than average. The bottom line, students who attend charters lose ground rather than gain ground by a two to one ratio. If charters do a better job, we have yet to see the data.

Or how about this one? "Charter schools were created as incubators of reform, to spread best practices to traditional schools." The next 'best practice' replicated will be the first.

How about, "there is no money for public schools?" Of course, there's never been Boston Public School students who cost us $60 million in tuitions that is taken from the BPS budget have never been Boston Public School students.

A good number of these students have gone from parochial or private schools directly to charter schools. So their attendance at charter schools has not saved the BPS any funds. Not one penny in costs has been saved. Why should the BPS lose funds each year to educate these charter school students, at least without knowing whether or not these students were formerly BPS students? Incidentally, under the new education reform law, the lost dollars will grow to $110 Million annually beginning in 2013-2014.

One could argue that these students live in the city, so they are as much entitled to city funds as public school students. That's not a terrible argument, but it's a different argument. In fact, it'd be a much better argument if charter schools opened up their doors to all students.

The Superintendent Speaks

By Richard Stutman

BTU President

Richard Stutman

BTU President

Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson

addresses the BTU Rep. Conference, expressing BPS professional development (PD) opportunities. She reported themes of the feedback included, "teachers wanting to be asked about the type of PD offered.

Merry Christmas

Happy Hanukkah

HAPPY KWANZAA

from the Boston Teachers Union

(continued on page 2)
What is Bullying and Where/How is it Prohibited?

At this year’s annual Building Repre-
sentatives Conference, BTU President and Executive Board member Matthew E. Doyer addressed the union on the newly enacted anti-bullying legislation.

By Michael J. Maguire

Part two of a part two series

The new law prohibits “bullying” in:

> on a school bus or any other vehicle owned, leased or used by a school or school district;
> through the use of technology or an electronic device used by a school or school district.

The law also prohibits retaliation against reportees, those who furnish information in an investigation into bullying, or against anyone who possesses or releases information about bullying.

Bullying not occurring at the above places requiring active harm to the victim or damage to the victim’s property;

Bullying defined

Bullying is repeated use by one or more students of written, verbal or elec-
tronic expression or a physical act or gesture of any combination of the above which is directed at a “victim” and:

1. causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damages to the victim’s property;
2. places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damages to his property;
3. creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;
4. infringes on the victim’s rights at school;
5. materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

The term “victim” means a student target — not staff.

Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-bullies “bullying (see above) through the use of technology or elec-
tronic communication…”

Cyber-bullying includes:

> creation of a web page or blog on which the creator assumes another’s identity;
> knowing impersonation of another as the author of posted content or messages if the creation of imper-
sonation produces any of the condi-
tions in (i) — (v) above.

Cyber-bullying also includes the elec-
dronic distribution of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons who are not the individuals posting presenting any of the conditions enumerated in (i) — (v) above.

Other Feathers of the Law

The law requires that the “principal or designee” promptly investigate any re-
port of bullying (see above) if a determination that bullying or retalia-
tion has occurred, the investigator is re-
quired to (i) notify local law enforcement if he/she believes that criminal charges may be pursued against a perpe-
trator [very vague]; (ii) take appropriate disciplinary action; (iii) notify the parents and guardians of both a perpetrator and victim and (iv) to the extent consistent with state or federal law, notify them of the steps taken to prevent further bully-
ing or retaliation.

Where bullying or retaliation involves students from more than one covered entity, the first to receive a report of bully-
ing must “promptly notify the administra-
tor of the other school district or school.”

Bullying or retaliation on school grounds involving a former student under 21 no longer enrolled is to be referred to local law enforcement where criminal activity is suspected.

The law neither supersedes nor re-
places existing legal rights or remedies “nor shall section create a private right of action.”

DESE is obligated, after consultation with specified agencies, to (1) develop and publish a model plan for districts to consider when creating their own plans; (2) compile a list of bullying prevention and intervention resources and evidence-
centered best practices to make available to schools. It is to be consistent with the behavioral health and public schools’ framework developed under St. 2008 c.321 Section 10, updated biennially and posted on the agency’s website.

Come to the BTU Children’s Holiday Party

BTU Hall

Wednesday, December 29, 2010
12 noon to 2:00 pm

A Look at a Few Oft-Told Distortions and Half-Truths

About Charters, Funding, and the City’s Resources…

(continued from page 1)

| SPED and ELL alike. But as long as chart-
ers continue to exclude children who need these additional services, it is hard to argue that they are truly public schools and thus deserving of public funds.

And when will there be enough money? Let’s acknowledge up front that no one wants to spend any more on taxes. But let’s also acknowledge that fundamental to the issue of taxes is that the system of raising revenue need not be fair. (Though since it is lated, Bill Gates ought to pay more than John Q. Smith, and GE ought to pay more than the Harry’s Market.)

Boston is a wonderful and exciting city, and like many other cities it is blessed with a wealth of non-profit cultural, educa-
tional and medical institutions. In fact, one half of the city’s geography is inhab-
ited by the aforementioned institutions as well as the state (Massport in East Bos-
ton). These institutions do not have to pay property tax, which is the primary way our city raises revenue. The less the non-
profits pay, the more John Q. Smith and Harry’s Market pay. Because no one wants to pay more in property taxes (who can blame them?), and because of how called Proposition 2-1/2, the city’s ability to raise needed revenue is hamstringing. So every year there is a budget shortfall and a budget battle. Schools compete with the Fire De-
partment and so for scarce revenues, and both compete with the Parks Department. And so it goes, year after year.

The only way out of this, the only way for the city to be able to raise revenue, is for the legislature to change the 16/10 law that mandates that we have to pay our fair share of taxes. Then we won’t have to ask the question, “when will there be enough money?” Until then, we are left wondering how much John Q. Smith and Harry’s Market have to pay. There actually is enough money — only our leaders had the political will to go after it.
blame on those who choose to work with the most challenging students than it is to interrogate our own beliefs.

Boston's students face obstacles that their counterparts in other districts do not. Boston serves over 56,000 students. 38% do not speak English as their first language and 19.6% are enrolled in special education. Statewide the averages are 15.4% and 17% respectively. They also wage a daily war against poverty. In stark contrast with the richest 20% of families, 65% of our students receive federally-funded free meals, a benefit for families earning at or below 130% of the poverty line (a paltry $28,665 for a family of four). [http://www.profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&leftNavId=305&]

Because schools cannot be divorced from the surrounding community, we need to understand the interconnectedness of poverty and low academic achievement. Merely denouncing students as illiterate does nothing to address the reality that is hidden when we equate test scores with success.

And yet our students persevere, showing resilience in the face of adversity. The English Language Learners (ELLs) at my school have been in 10th grade knowing little-to-no English, yet three years later are reading (and even enjoying!) Shakespeare. We would be as successful in their shoes! Studies show that it takes ELLs an average of 5 years to reach grade-level aca-
ademic proficiency. I gladly write recommendation let-
ters to my colleagues that I have taught, encouraging them to apply for our school if they are interested in teaching ELLs. My students are beyond our control, but we are not powerless. We alter the future when we challenge students to question the validity of tests that label some learners “advanced” and others “failing.”

In addition to facing the rigorous expectations of students that cross our graduation stages, we need to question why thousands never get there. A staggering 24.4% of BPS's freshmen who entered BPS in 2004 dropped out over the next five years: during school year 2008-2009 alone we lost over 1,200 students. [http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/life/Final%20Dropout%202009.pdf]

Two years of teaching experience within the last ten years where you’ve taught at least 50% of the week or more all year in that subject area. In order to verify this, you must obtain and submit with the application, a letter from your principal detailing the specific years you taught the subject area 50% of the week or more.

The contract reads, “Teachers may be considered for transfer in any subject area in which they recently taught under the 1993 Massachusetts Educational Reform Act, even if they do not hold an active Boston Program Area; however; a schools Personnel Subcommittee shall not be required to select any such individual.” Often, if a teacher applies to transfer in an area that they do not hold a BPS APA, HR will not forward the info to the school for consideration.

Why do we have to jump through these hoops if we have already recertified the license, isn’t that redundant? In my opinion, yes it is. This process is a holdover from long ago and far away, when Mass. teachers were issued “licenses for life”. A teacher could be certified in an area they hadn’t taught in or taken course work for in decades, and still be eligible to transfer into that area. This belief was negated in order for the BPS to ensure the teacher be ‘current’ in the subject area in question. The BTU attempted to negotiate elimination of this arguably anticipated process, but the BPS wanted too much in return for agreeing to do so which would have further limited teachers flexibility & rights. We couldn’t settle for that!

**Will there be a BPS early retirement incentive this school year?**

Yes, there will be a one-time incentive of $5,000 for early notification of termination/retirement to teacher unit members of the BTU with an application deadline of January 5, 2011. Please see Superintendent’s Circular HRS-PP8; “Incentives for Early Retirement of Termination for Boston Teachers Union – Teacher Unit.”

In order to be eligible the following criteria must be met: An individual must have a minimum of ten (10) years of continuous service in the BPS and meet the minimum age requirement of being 55 years old. BTU employees who meet said criteria on leave of absence can also apply.

Once the application is accepted by the BPS Office of Human Resources by execution of the Separation Agreement, it is binding and irrevocable. The termination of employment must be effective between June 30, 2011 and August 21, 2011. Applicants will not be eligible for unemployment compensation and acceptance of this incentive shall not affect any rights of a member under the Teacher Retirement Law. If accepted, a one-time-payment of $5,000 will be made by February 4, 2011. Individuals planning to retire must also file an “Intent to Retire” form with the City of Boston Retirement Board which cannot be filed more than 45 days before their retirement date. Those BTU/teachers unit employees, who want to apply for this incentive, must submit the application contained in BPS’s Human Resources Circular in the BPS Human Resource Office. By January 9, 2011. If you have any further questions regarding same, please contact Wanda Manzo in BPS HR at 617-635-9382, wmanzo@boston.k12.ma.us. This incentive is offered to allow the BPS to know earlier where there will be openings in order to be able to hire earlier for the upcoming new SY.

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

Generally, teachers are entitled to take 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), no 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.

**Who’s responsible for plowing school parking lots?**

The contract states, “The School Committee shall guarantee that snow is plowed from school yards used for parking at no expense to bargaining unit [BTU] members.”

**What happens when there is no heat in my classroom?**

The contract is clear on this issue. “A classroom will be closed when the temperature falls below 60 °F, or whenever the temperature or climate becomes too oppressive.”

Report and record the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available space that is heated adequately as per the appropriate administrator. Keep a record or log of all of the days without heat and the temperature in the room at that time. The Principal should immediately report this in order for the heat restored. Teachers should file a Step 2 grievance with the principal as well.

If the entire school falls below the acceptable heat level, each building has an alternate plan in case of emergency. If the heating issue can’t be fixed quickly, then the emergency plan for relocation should be employed. The BTU members at the affected school should file a Step 1 grievance at the school in addition. If entire school is without heat and it has been reported to the School Department, please contact the BTU office as well.

***United we stand – divided we beg.***

**Is the BTU hiring?**

AFT Massachusetts needs your help with our representation of Teachers and Staff by visiting: [www.aftacts.org](http://www.aftacts.org)

**Join the Boston Teachers Union!**

By joining the BTU you join 7,000 teachers and support staff who are fighting for:

- Competitive salaries and benefits
- Job security
- A meaningful voice in decision making
- Medical coverage for all
- A positive educational environment
- Competitive staff development
- Fair discipline
- Adequate school facilities
- A voice in school governance
- Flexible work schedules
- Afterschool programs
- Access to professional organizations

Contact Dan Justice at 617-635-9382, djustice65@gmail.com
We’re Learning Here  
A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.

The Parkway Academy of Technology and Health (PATH) is a “small school” within the West Roxbury High School Complex. It’s hard to get a sense of the school community because classes and administrative offices are spread throughout three floors of this massive building. Lockers line hallways and a few small notices are tacked to doorways; I miss seeing the large colorful displays of student work evident in many schools – perhaps the fire marshals have visited recently?

When I look more closely, I notice a classroom door in a small “alley” near the principal’s office covered with samples of student writing. Inside, Ms. Eisenschmidt is using a projection from her laptop to focus a class discussion on what makes a “civil” society. Her ninth grade students are totally engaged in considering questions such as “How can one keep the ideas that inspired a society from being abused?” As they invent their own societies, they’re prompted to consider how they will educate their people, sustain the economy, develop and enforce laws. I’m fascinated!

There are many science classes going on: students are examining plants, learning about cell division, and making presentations to their classmates about infectious diseases. In humanities classes, it’s clear that literature and the study of history are well integrated. Talking with students a week later, including one young man with autism, I’m struck by how articulate and passionate they are about their learning. I doubt their MCAS scores could begin to capture this, however, and I feel privileged to be able to share their voices in this column.

My friend and former colleague, PATH’s Curriculum Access Coordinator Yvonne Watson, welcomed me and facilitated my visit. Several students were working in her office to make up assignments during their lunch period, and in the cafeteria they consulted her on a variety of personal issues. I also observed teachers coaching individual students in between classes. As we consider closing small schools in Boston to save money, and knowing how critical relationships are to effective teaching, I wonder what will be lost in terms of this kind of attention to each student’s needs.

I was doing annotations in Humanities class. We’ve been reading A Tale of Two Cities, by Charles Dickens. I’ve learned that evil can come from anywhere and can be influenced by anything.

– George Woodman, Grade 12

I was using the computer to research something about World War II and the Holocaust, which we’re studying in our Humanities class. I’ve learned that Hitler was a dictator who killed a lot of innocent people.

– Ryan Gromada, Grade 10

I was checking our poster board project grades in Dr. Merchant’s Anatomy & Physiology class. From our own research and from class presentations we learned about many types of infections, such as viral hepatitis, that can be spread by blood transfusions.

– Christopher Castilla and Silvi Topi, Grade 11

We were working on creating a brochure in French about the five most important people in our lives. We’ve learned how to say our names and to speak in sentences; we’re looking forward to someday going to Paris and being able to communicate with people there!

– Jerrica Ortiz, Grade 11 & Sadidd Maldonado, Grade 12

Ms. Eisenschmidt was helping us review the characteristics of a society before we created our own. Reading the story of Harrison Bergeron, in which the government forces everyone to be “equal” but there’s no room for personal talents, taught us that there’s no such thing as a perfect society. We’ve also learned that you can’t let anyone else tell you who you are, and that people often fear those who are different than themselves.

– Hiram Colon, Manashky Moreta & Shara Nelson, Grade 9

I am observing a plant with Ms. Saxena. We’ve been looking at the structures of plants in this class, AP Biology, and I’ve learned the difference between primary and secondary growth.

– Adyemi Adeniyi, Grade 11

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– Ryan Gromada, Grade 10

I was reviewing my work in Humanities. This year I’ve learned how to analyze a book or play like Macbeth.

– Anastasia Kalambokis, Grade 12

I was taking notes in Biotech, answering questions to help me understand. In this class I’ve learned that hereditary genes can be dominant or recessive.

– Ricardo Guerrero, Grade 10

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Jennifer Dines was eager to interview with members of the Special Education Faculty Senate because she is proud of her teaching team, proud of her students and proud of her school. Jennifer is in her 4th year of teaching and her 1st year at the Lila G. Frederick Pilot Middle School.

Jennifer is an inclusion teacher working in a team with 42 sixth grade students, many of whom are English language learners. She has responsibility for implementing and updating Individual Education Plans for seven resource room students and two students with language based learning disabilities. Reading and math levels for her SPED students range from 1st to 6th grade. These students spend most of their day in one of two regular classrooms where Jennifer co-teaches. Her teaching day is full and varied. It can include a pull-out session for her special education students, teaching a lesson in reading and writing strategies with a focus on vocabulary and non-fiction for 21 students, observing and monitoring the progress of students during a lesson taught by a co-teacher, providing assistance to regular education, gifted, and ESL students during a lesson, and meeting with the other teachers and staff on her team.

Jennifer is part of a teaching team that includes Meghan McGoldrick, math and science, and Jessica Lider, humanities. They are joined several times a week by an ESL teacher, paraprofessional, library assistant, and interns. The idea is that the group’s staff is highly trained and experienced working with ELLs and SPED students. All understand the importance of accommodations based on individual student needs. There is an atmosphere of trust between the teaching team members.

Jennifer makes this inclusion model so successful. Her answer was long and provided great insight.

First is the motivated and cohesive team of professionals who have high expectations for themselves and for all their students. This group of staff is highly trained and experienced working with ELLs and SPED students. All understand the importance of accommodations based on individual student needs. There is an atmosphere of trust between the teachers that results in honest feedback of what is working and what is not. 1-2 weekly whole team meetings allow for constant review of data showing students’ progress and needs. Jennifer explained, “We honestly critique our own teaching methods and try new things”. Jennifer also explains that administrators who provide ongoing support are important to the team.

Early in the year Jennifer met with a teacher leader, Deborah O’Shea, who helped her anticipate and prepare for what would be covered in her performance evaluation. Having support and help to implement supports before her evaluation made the process feel safe and valuable.

Teachers follow state and core standards but have flexibility. Jennifer has found excellent teaching resources like Best Practices in Reading, (Options Publishers Inc.), bookshare.org, and gizdut.com. She can veer from a traditional pacing guide to provide more explicit instruction and repetition. Teacher teams created differentiated programs like Strive For 25, which encourage students to read and write about 25 books per year independently and at their own level. At other times, teachers read class novels and text books out loud for content. Small needs-based groups meet twice per week for literacy instruction and content depth; there is an all boys group, an all girls group, a group for gifted students, and a group for students with language-based learning struggles.

Another important factor in success is the availability of needed resources. When Jennifer asked for writing textbooks for all her students, she got them from her teacher leader. When accommodations are recommended, the materials (i.e. e-asel, subscription-based websites such as Achieve 3000, Brainpop, and Discovery Education) are available. Every student in the school has their own laptop computer.

In this teaching environment students are thriving. A high student teacher ratio and a strong code of discipline result in few serious behavior problems that disrupt learning. Last year students made significant improvement in both ELA and math. Special education students benefit from being part of a large group of peers with a wide range of interests.

When asked about what she might change if granted her wish Jennifer answered without hesitation. First, a full time reading specialist with training in rules based phonics instruction. Second, more district-offered professional development opportunities for special education teachers that are easy to find on line and have enough openings for all to enroll.

Many parents, students and teachers want to see more inclusion opportunities in the Boston Public Schools. The new special education director John Veer has also identified inclusion as a key goal. The SPED Faculty Senate would like to thank Jennifer and her team for providing inspiration and a model of inclusion that works.

You can email us at: magnum@verizon.net
The Superintendent Speaks…

the quality vs. the quantity of PD was also
ers was received well. Identifying more
school in the fall for a couple of credits. For
high school diploma. It is essential. Girls
67% of them as opposed to 55% of boys
students in the district which she attributes
to two things; the fact that BPS WIC is an
of ELL population as Boston. In math we
performed all of the state in grade 10, scores went
down. In grade 10, significant progress was
made at the Eliot, USA, Haley, Roosevelt,
and moved Young Achievers pilot K-8 to
Continue, the Superintendent reported, "Time
is not the only variable for improvement. Qual-
y to other performing schools. We need to
work on how to recruit, retain and pro-
love to get some of the best teachers to go
to under performing schools. We need to
work on how to recruit, retain and pro-
redesign its current
area would be very helpful. She observed
that the district is being "embraced by its com-
and should "get the word out to promote
what we do in this respect, we have common

eaching of Urban Science Academy (USA) led off the Q&A
session by stating that as a teacher of
that were not successful in their applications.
three years. The Clapp Elementary is small
have 350 enrolled— it's hard to hold onto
be changing. The Early Learning Cen-
to graduation that they did so through
have 300 more kids in last years' pro-
also schools such as the Dearborn which
wrote in the article whose facilities are in
very bad shape. Some space has been
closed off and those extra classes are not
there. Enrollment. For each of those pro-
We had 300 more kids in last year's pro-
programs." Every time a new or private school
opened we went out to valuate it. The
students who go to charter schools
do not go by the same geode we do.
Charter schools are treated as if they have
the same high standards as BPS. We also
have to transport the kids who go to them from all
over the city by law. This year we have a
$62 million budget gap." Dr. Johnson
continued, "We conducted a survey in the
district which are projected to con-
tribute to this deficit, including aligning
the common core standards, improving
district wide data systems, capital im-
provements, repairs to school buildings,
loss of stimulus money that as added to
the budget of the current SY, and the"

Superintendent Johnson then segued to the Q & A portion of her presentation
and asked, "Can we educate all kids if given
the opportunity when parents and students
are engaged. Looking at BPS MCAS scores
from 2009-2010 in math we are still
outperforming all of the state in the
category in progress made. We start with
lower scores, but we are making more
progress. Significant progress was
made at the Eliot, USA, Haley, Roosevelt,
M. Lyon, Lee Elementary, Perkins, and
Gardner schools. We did not make sig-
nificant progress in grade 10, it was flat. In
the middle school category in math we
outperformed all of the state in MCAS
growth. On national Assess-
ments under the NAPS, Boston is one of
20 cities that oversampled. Boston had
the best math performance in the country
on NAPS.

The Council of Great City Schools
contains the 60 largest cities in the

country and they did a big study as to why
Boston outperformed everyone else in
math. What they found is that they were
where they outperformed everyone in
ELA. Atlanta does not have as large an
ELL population as Boston.

"While we are doing well overall, we
still have a lot of work to do particularly
in middle schools. We need to look more
closely at our middle schools which
6th grades to see better what’s happening
with that program. Looking at the Gates
Million, we had 16,000 students who
awarded undergraduate and graduate
tuition. 11 are in Massachusetts,
six of who are from Boston—three of
who are dual-language immersion and
Eight BPS High Schools in the past two years
have appeared in the US News and
World Report.

The Superintendent reviewed the
progress the District has made in closing
the achievement gap citing over 12 years
of 10th grade ELA scores which is the area
the BPS has come closest to closing
said gap.

Dr. Johnson continued, "Last summer
we celebrated the opening of the Edu-
cal (PICO) 700 kids who didn’t
dropped out were contacted and 550 returned.
We still have 350 enrolled— it’s hard to hold onto
them. It’s hard to keep them in school in a timely
to graduation that they did so through
credit recovery. Some were so far behind they
enrolled in GED or adult

programs. We were surprised that hundreds
of kids came back to reengagement
center. It’s tricky and requires a lot of hand
holding. We are encouraging them to
where they were as far as credits. In
high schools we are creating a one page
tracking sheet to make it easier for students to
keep track of where they are going. We are
working on an ongoing basis that can be
printed out. It will get kids to own their
own work and they don’t know all the steps to
degradation."

"There is good news about the gradua-
tion rate. In 2007 it was 67% and by
2006 it’s up to 61%. Using credit recovery
about 200 kids who needed to take 1 to 2
credits were able to graduate from high school in
the fall for a couple of credits. For
these kids to move on they need a high
school diploma. It is essential. Girls
are first and they are a minority. 67%
of them as opposed to 55% of boys
graduate which is a differential that is true
across all racial and ethnic groups except
certain population. It’s a challenge we
still have to work on with black and His-
panic boys of color.

An area the Superintendent is excited
about is the potential for improvement with ELL
students in the district which she
attributes to two things; the fact that
BPS WIC is an under performing school; and
the importance of teachers. Teachers matter
more than anything.

"We can educate all kids if given
the opportunity when parents and students
are engaged. Looking at BPS MCAS scores
from 2009-2010 in math we are still
outperforming all of the state in the
category in progress made. We start with
lower scores, but we are making more
progress. Significant progress was
made at the Eliot, USA, Haley, Roosevelt,
M. Lyon, Lee Elementary, Perkins, and
Gardner schools. We did not make sig-
nificant progress in grade 10, it was flat. In
the middle school category in math we
outperformed all of the state in MCAS
growth. On national Assess-
ments under the NAPS, Boston is one of
20 cities that oversampled. Boston had
the best math performance in the country
on NAPS.

The Council of Great City Schools
contains the 60 largest cities in the

country and they did a big study as to why
Boston outperformed everyone else in
math. What they found is that they were
where they outperformed everyone in
ELA. Atlanta does not have as large an
ELL population as Boston.

"While we are doing well overall, we
still have a lot of work to do particularly
in middle schools. We need to look more
closely at our middle schools which
6th grades to see better what’s happening
with that program. Looking at the Gates
Million, we had 16,000 students who
awarded undergraduate and graduate
tuition. 11 are in Massachusetts,
six of who are from Boston—three of
who are dual-language immersion and
Eight BPS High Schools in the past two years
have appeared in the US News and
World Report.

The Superintendent reviewed the
progress the District has made in closing
the achievement gap citing over 12 years
of 10th grade ELA scores which is the area
the BPS has come closest to closing
d said gap.

Dr. Johnson continued, "Last summer
we celebrated the opening of the Edu-
cal (PICO) 700 kids who didn’t
dropped out were contacted and 550 returned.
We still have 350 enrolled— it’s hard to hold onto
them. It’s hard to keep them in school in a timely
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math. What they found is that they were
where they outperformed everyone in
ELA. Atlanta does not have as large an
ELL population as Boston.
Members present: Anne Marie Ashland; Ann Broder, Treasurer; Marie Broderick; Mary Carol Condon; John Dyer; Larry Couter, President; Phil Faustino; Eileen Goff; Donna Cooley-Hilton; Ruthanne Kennedy; Linda McNamara; Marilyn Marion, Secretary; Leonard Mirgialla, Vice Chairman; Mary Jo Murphy, and Paul Tenney.

Excused: Bonnie Mitten.

Meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 10:15 a.m. Secretary: Minutes read with revisions noted. Report Accepted.

Treasurer: Report accepted as read.

Vice Chairman: There are 7 new DELTA members. Membership will be informed via mail regarding the DELTA one-year commitment needed. Suggestion was given to the chairman to consider an open-enrollment period. Report Accepted.

Chairman: Chairman and jew was pleased with the business meeting and Sherif Cabral’s excellent presentation. Cabral’s office will send us pictures taken at the business meeting.

Donations for the golf tournament continue to be received in Rose Marie’s name. Because of the holiday weekend, there is difficulty getting participants. However, the tournament will take place, as scheduled, on October 11 at 8:30 a.m.

Chairman noted that he met with BTU officials regarding RTC contributions or the expenses incurred by the RTC. Discussion in this regard took place. Chairman also mentioned that the appeal for our benefits will be voted on at the next active teacher membership meeting.

Chairman mentioned that RTC delegates at QUEST conferences have become an issue with the BTU active teachers. Discussion about our involvement in QUEST will be taken up in New Business.

Question as to our receiving a report about our contribution to the BTU was raised. Further clarification in this regard is needed. Report Accepted.

Benefits: Chair presented a renewal analysis in which the membership will pay 2% for next year. Motion: to increase the 2% by 1% to a total of 3%. Motion accepted.

Remembrance: Remembrance list, which will include Charles Andrew and Rose Marie Donovan, will not only be available in the November 2010 but will also be available at the November luncheon.

Membership: No report.

Social: Returns for reservations for the fall luncheon continue to come in. Committee asked to board if crafters will be at the luncheon and where. If so, what will they be selling crafters? Will they be in the lounge and how many? Discussion resulted in the following motion: Motion: To allow 12 to 15 crafters to board; to have crafters register in advance; to be placed in the lounge and to charge crafters $20. Motion approved. Report Accepted.

Travel: Flyer’s are up bringing trips have been sent to the membership; will be on the RTC link on the BTU website and will be placed on the tables at the luncheon. Chairman: A good turnout to the BTU website and will be placed on the tables at the luncheon. Chairman: A good turnout to the BTU website and will be placed on the tables at the luncheon. Chairman: A good turnout to the BTU website and will be placed on the tables at the luncheon. Chairman: A good turnout to the BTU website and will be placed on the tables at the luncheon.

Legislative: Chair reported that with the Governor at the AFL-CIO convention regarding letters sent to him by the membership. She reported that he was not aware of the letters. The Legislative Committee will direct a letter to the Governor about the letters that we signed for. This letter was not ready to go out at this meeting.

Motion: To approve the 2% increase. Motion passed.

Old Business: Chairman mentioned that RTC delegates at QUEST conferences have become an issue with the BTU active teachers. Discussion about our involvement in QUEST will be taken up in New Business.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Marion, Secretary

Boston Union Teacher December 2010 7

BOSTON UNION TEACHER December 2010 7

BTU Speaks to the Community…

(pensive to educate. Arne Duncan, Obama’s Secretary of Education, argues that we need schools with the flexibility to come up with great new ideas.

But let’s look at some ideas we already have. In September I met Milvia when she began a new job in the lunch room next door to me. Milvia’s children attend a traditional public school in East Boston. At the Otis School there is a program called Family School funded through the Department of Education’s Title I funding. The program is staffed two days a week by volunteers after school and get extra help and supervised play time outdoors. Parents attend classes to improve their English while their younger children attend preschool. Together students and parents talk about healthy eating, play board games, read books, and go on field trips to the aquarium, local library and playgrounds. A biliterate teacher is on staff to help all the families of children, and you can see the results. Last month the school cafeteria was packed with parents learning about how to help their children with their school work. Milvia did improve her English and now she runs a school kitchen and works afternoons at the Otis Family preschool. By all measures - student attendance and test scores, parent education and involvement - The Family School is a success. So has the Department of Education taken this great idea and spread it? Exactly the opposite. Initially there were 24 Family Schools in Massachusetts. But federal funds were cut. Now the Otis is one of only 4 Family Schools left.

The state calls schools in our cities underperforming. I agree there is a lot we can and must do to improve our schools. But let’s stop blaming teachers, most who work extra hours, and find new ways to increase family money for classroom supplies, and care deeply about our students. A better description for our schools is underfunded. We need public funding that does not depend on grants that come and go on bake sales. We need more schools with full time nurses, counselors and parent coordinators, with nutrition and fitness programs, health care centers in the large high schools, extra help for disruptive students, as well as great text books and curriculum, a fair evaluation process to support or weed out ineffective teachers, teacher training, and parent involvement. Title I schools and school staff with adequate resources make a powerful team with many answers. Thank you.

(Marylie Croby is an occupational therapist in East Boston. She is also a member of the North Shore Labor Council’s Women’s Committee.)
School Site Council Training Held at the BTU

An all-day School Site Council training was held at the BTU on Saturday, November 20th for teams of SSC members including the principal of each school. Over 50 participants and a dozen schools sent teams to learn about budget basics from John McDonough, BPS CFO (photo at right); as well as the history, purpose, role, authority, & responsibilities of SSCs. Further trainings will be held as a joint BTU-BPS endeavor in conjunction with BPS Office of Parent & Student Engagement. For more information please contact Caren Carew ccarew@btsun.org.

The Superintendent Speaks…

(continued from page 7)

portation when due to buses being late in the morning; they were losing time on teaching and learning. Parents have reportedly been calling and complaining.

The Superintendent explained, “We had been doing a manual route looking to save resources in transpiration. To keep spending $100 million on transportation is unacceptable when we need money for materials, etc. in the classroom. We put enough money into automated routing but we didn’t spend enough time to drive the routes. Some schools went from the first tier to the second tier [start times] and then there is a third tier. Now we are making major changes in routing. I reduced the number of buses which made the drivers hours change making many of them upset.”

Betsy Drinan, teacher leader at the Boston Teachers Union Pilot K-8 School stated she appreciated the statement of increased focus of the district on social emotional issues while adding that if we believe that is important, we have to staff it. Elaborating she implored that if we believe that is important, we have to staff it. Dia and that the Superintendent explained, “We tend to think of our work as academic but there are a lot of families who need custodial care as well.”

Barbara Nowak, a Spanish teacher at O’Byrant bemoaned the fact that while the class size maximum in high schools is 31 students, some Spanish classes have been at 41, 53, & 68 students. She stated the teachers filed class size grievances right away during the overloaded but subs have been covering since the first week of school and their students are receiving only pass or fail grades. These exam school high school students are worried about their GPA’s. Dr. Johnson replied, “I am so sorry. Most of the time the staffing adjustments are made by the end of September.”

Geralyn Fagan, a special education paraprofessional from the East Zone ELC, observed that the larger challenge facing us is the attack on teachers and unions which is a real struggle in that the vast majority of the charter schools are doing the same or less well as public schools. Diane Rovitch sometimes presents her point of view locally which she hoped the Superintendent would round up the BPS School Committee and other policy makers to go to hear the next time Rovitch was in town. She stated that we are battling for public education and that the opposition wants to destroy same through creating a dual system.

Dr. Johnson rejoined, “I bought the book for myself & ordered more for my executive team. I will also do so for the School Committee. We have to be willing to self correct. People out there don’t believe we can self correct and we have great teachers working in our classrooms every day – something against significant odds. We are always asking what we can do to improve teaching and learning. Many teachers feel the PD is being done to, not with them. It is a trust issue.”

Iris Coronel, a teacher from the Mattahunt in K-2 reported that in order to close the achievement gap there need to be sufficient paraprofessionals in our classrooms. She stated that we are missing this vital person in many classes because they are being taken out of their classes to substitute and perform clerical duties around the school. She also emphasized that sharing best practices is key; it can create a strong base of knowledge. Dr. Johnson answered, “We are reviewing all recommendations. The ELC that has been listed as closing was not being considered for this due to performance, just for the facility it is in.”

Anne Minichino, a nurse from The English High School stated that as a nurse, she IF’s kids who are at risk who had not passed middle school. There were 250 kids in the 9th grade, 71 who had not passed, who are now placed in EHS, a Turnaround school. The Headmaster offered them summer school and 33 showed up, the rest were as she stated, “behind the eight ball in September as they were coming to English High unprepared, which, she reported, has been going on for a number of years at EHS.”

The Superintendent responded, “The index of these students has multi-factors. In eighth grade less than 80% of the students failed one or more of their core courses, gaining a low GPA making them a high risk for dropping out. We give this list of students to the headmasters and without major interventions, they will drop out. When they didn’t go and invest in themselves in middle school, they are then missing their core content. This is a challenge. In Chicago, they held these students back for multiple years. At Young Achievers I have 16 & 17 year olds in middle school who are too old and are not an appropriate mix match. We have to figure out what to do without holding them back.”

Bruce Collotta, teacher at CASH in Hyde Park Ed Complex, acknowledged that the Superintendent ‘touched it out” at HPEC community meeting where the audience weighed in on her proposal for closing what she termed under-performing schools by having said students be able to attend higher performing schools. HPEC lacks resources and he observed the 1100 students moved out of HPEC if it is closed won’t be attending “better schools”. He recounted the disruption her proposal would mean to the students and their families during this difficult economic time when stability is needed more than ever. He then recounted the positive accomplishments and atmosphere of rigorous teaching and learning that occurs at the Complex. Colotta asserted that small schools do work in that the MCAS scores in all three schools in the Complex scores went up. He emphasized that the kids feel safe there and that they are now filled with anxiety not knowing if their schools will close. He asked that the Superintendent & School Committee reconsider and give the school another chance.” The Superintendent asked for a copy of the testimony Mr. Collotta read.

Superintendent Johnson concluded her Q&A session by stating, “I’m grateful to Richard Stutman for reaching out and allowing me to obtain information directly from you and to learn more to improve the district.” Dr. Johnson then stayed to answer individuals’ questions and to hear their concerns.

Bethany Wood, a former English teacher at ACC accompanied Dr. Johnson and was introduced as a person now working at Court Street in order to provide assistance to teachers about interna-