School Rallies Will Help to Jump Start Serious Negotiations

The Message: TALK TO TEACHERS!

By Richard Stutman
BTU President

On Friday, November 18th, thousands of BTU members around the city came to school that morning with an added purpose: to tell the school district that it’s time to settle contract negotiations. The message: Talk to Teachers!

Negotiations have been dragging on long enough. The district is represented in negotiations by a team that is headed by outside counsel and the superintendent is nowhere in sight. It’s time to Talk to Teachers.

We have a long list of unresolved issues. We need to resolve them to improve our schools. Here’s a partial list:

• Will the school day be extended? What will be the compensation? What exactly will be taught and how can we make the teaching and learning experience most productive?
• How can we make performance evaluation meaningful and effective?
• What types of professional growth opportunities will our members be able to attain? How can we strengthen professional development?
• How can we shore up the ELL category training and be sure that it actually helps our English Language Learners?
• How can we have legitimate input on how to fix the disorganization currently existing in our SPED department?
• Should we lower class size in our so-called under performing and close-to-under performing schools?
• Is the superintendent truly serious about asking for an additional 100 hours per year of professional development or would we all be better off trying to shore up the quality of the development we currently have?
• What rate of salary increase do we need to keep our salaries competitive and attractive?

There are many reasons why the superintendent ought to attend these bargaining sessions. We’ll pick just four.

Reason #1 — Her team says the district wants an extended day of 30 minutes. The superintendent has told the Globe she wants an hour.

Reason #2 — Her team has never given any concrete proposal on how many additional hours of professional development the district wants. The superintendent has told the Globe she wants 100 hours.

(continued on page 12)
By Ricardo Vega

It is by my capability to embrace the mistake that I measure the quality of my teaching. Long time ago I decided to abandon the idea of teaching to my students. And except for a few random occasions where circumstances have forced me to do so, I seem to rely on that capability to try to solve problems for the students I present. I believe that it is in that willingness to try possible solutions for the situations I present and how to do things to my classes, I believe that it is the key to effectiveness.

A good student then is the one that makes as little mistakes as possible. Under this environment students quickly develop a new strategy – the assessment tool – to no teaching. Otherwise school years, shall employ him to serve at the public employment arena, i.e., ‘substitute teacher’ status shall be notified in writing on or before June fifteenth whenever such person is not to be employed for the following school year. Unless such notice is given in the form provided, a teacher without such status shall be deemed to be appointed for the following school year.

A teacher with professional teacher status, pursuant to section forty-one, shall not be dismissed except in the case of inefficiency, incompetency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher, insubordination or failure on the part of the teacher to satisfy performance standards developed pursuant to section thirty-eight of this chapter or other just cause. A teacher with professional teacher status may seek review of a dismissal decision within thirty days after receiving notice of his dismissal by filing a petition for arbitration with the commissioner.

A teacher with professional teacher status shall be entitled to professional teacher status or PTS – not tenure – as we commonly call it, a process that is worth implementing, it takes time, a few words of advice, be patient, I believe that mistakes need to be self-corrected by the student, not by me as their teacher. Creativity and eagerness to express opinions. If something is by my capability to embrace the mistake that I measure the quality of my teaching. Long time ago I decided to abandon the idea of teaching to my students. And except for a few random occasions where circumstances have forced me to do so, I seem to rely on that capability to try possible solutions for the situations I present and how to do things to my classes, I believe that it is the key to effectiveness.

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Public school teachers in the state of Massachusetts no longer have tenure. We lost that during the Massachusetts education reform Act in line 2010. The decision to impose our professional status and threshold for dismissal from same was reduced to what was described in the preceding para-

Currently mass. Public school teachers are dismissed due to “just cause”. Based on the changed state law, teachers at Turn Around schools are dismissed due to the reduced standard of “good cause” – what’s the difference?

The words ‘good cause’ have long been defined as ‘any ground which is put forward by the supervising authority to show that good faith and which is neither arbitrary, irrational, unreasonable, or irrelevant to the… task of building up and maintaining an efficient school system.’ Rinaldo v. School Comm. of Beverly, 294 Mass. 167, 169, 1 N.E.2d 37 (1938). Sch. Dist. of Louisburg Xaverian, 52 Mass. App. Ct. 226, 757 N.E.2d 205 (2001) (Cowin, J., writing for plurality).

‘By comparison, the words “just cause” have a somewhat different meaning in the public employment arena, i.e., “substantial misconduct which adversely affects the public interest.” Murray v. Sec.-

Unlike with so-called underperforming / Turn Around schools, the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010 does not specify the standard for dismissal at turnarounds, and thus the decision was made, while the default “just cause” standard should prevail according to our attorneys, however it would not surprise them if the BPS put forth an argument against same.

When student of mine is sus-
pended, am I entitled to discuss re-
quirements with them? Yes. The contract clearly states, “Teacher directly involved in the suspension of a student shall have the opportunity, if re-
sulted, to confer with students or parents or legal guardians prior to the readmittance of the suspended student.” This contract provision can be a powerful tool in assisting the teacher – parent connection to be forged at a time when such communication is imperative for the effic-
cacious reentry and ongoing success of said student. It does little good to exclude a student through suspension without a shared action plan for the student supported by the key stakeholders in the child’s life. Let’s seize the opportunity and capitalize on it, while “focusing on children.”

Is there any life insurance through the BPS for teachers?
The BPS/BTU labor management agreement details the “employee [City of Boston] contribution to the life insurance portion of the group insurance plan ($5,000 per year for the first $50,000 of life insurance value or $7,500 per year for any additional life insurance value)” (BTU 2001).

How do teachers obtain access to their personnel file?
In order to view your personnel file, go to the BPS Human Resources Department on the third floor of 20 Court Street within a reasonable enough time during regular business hours (9-5) for HR to retrieve your personal file and provide it in its contents. A photo ID to verify your iden-
tity in order to have access to your file must be presented. If you like the use of the phone and 617-635-5000. A teacher has a right to access to his or her file without delay. You also have access to your file at the individual school level, if your principal/headmaster keeps them there as well. The same parameters de-
tailed below apply to your official files at HR and to the ones at your school if kept.

The BTU labor/management contract states, “No material derogatory to a teacher’s conduct, service, character, or personality shall be placed in the files unless the teacher has had an opportunity to read the material. The teacher shall acknowledge that he or she has read such material by affixing his/her signature on the actual copy to be filed, with the understanding that such signature merely signifies that he or she has read the material to be filed. Such signature does not necessarily indicate agreement with its content.” The contract also states that any teacher filing a complaint to the right to answer any material filed and his or her answer shall be reviewed by the Pru. “No material shall be attached to the file copy. Upon receipt of a written request, the teacher shall be furnished a reproduction of any material in his file.” If you are denied access to a file, and you believe you were unaware of which has been described above, and the like, you have a right to a file a grievance to the remedy situation.
Working in a Vacuum

The superintendent of the Boston Public Schools has many pressing issues. From the union’s perspective, settling the contract is paramount to providing our students with the most consistent and effective educational experience – our perpetual goal as the educators of Boston’s children. The general public’s perception of the BPS is surely one of a system lacking organization and constantly altering direction because of flawed planning. As members of this system we are maligned because of management’s shortcomings.

The union has bargained for over a year in an attempt to obtain a contract that is good for kids, good for the city, and fair for us. Over this year, we have had a new evaluation tool thrust upon us by a new state law. We have not agreed to it as we might have, as we should have, had we settled our contract by now. The Department of Justice has also added into the mix a scathing indictment of the BPS’s flawed category training. Both of these missteps on the part of the system had not been addressed by the Boston Teachers Union in the past, if only the BPS had listened.

The latest problem for the superintendent and the system is their inability to get students to school on time. Late school buses lead to late instructional time and in many cases the inability for our students to eat a breakfast. (And let’s keep in mind that school is the only opportunity for breakfast for many of our students.)

Many of our schools are being crippled by tardiness and its effect on early morning performance. Parents too are aggravated by this tardiness and its effect on their children. Some even want to remove their children from the system: not for educational reasons, but for not getting the services that they should take for granted.

This is the second consecutive year of having schools moved, enlarged, reduced, and possibly closed. Latin Academy was to be moved to Hyde Park, RAA was to take their building, and Fenway was to expand. These proposed moves again sparked problems in the city, the press, and in the school districts. Once again the system ended up retracting its position on realignment. When, I ask, will this system stabilize and not self implode?

It is unforgivable that at this point in the year, the BPS has so many major issues that point directly at its leadership. Simultaneously the school committee and the mayor recognized that a busing problem really does persist.

The school system again attacked the problem from above and tweaked its controls to make things marginally better. They still refuse to work with the bus drivers on a solution that is rooted in real world Boston instead of a mathematical algorithmic computer program.

They, like the state, have been bullheaded on meeting the guidelines effectively for second language learners. Now both entities have to work to meet the federal guidelines. Special education has not even addressed the issue of the BPS’s flawed category training. Both of these missteps on the part of the system have "joined the conversation!" It is all too apparent that the BPS will realize that top down administration is killing us. The BTU members with involvement in the design can help our students meet the benchmarks faster. We cannot do it alone and the school system needs to realize that they cannot either. It is almost 2012; our students need us working together, not as the old model of bosses and workers. We can only look at our two party system of Republicans and Democrats to see how self interest has worked. Our city, and more importantly, our student body, deserves better!

Because It’s Good Politics: Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director

What’s in a Name?

We live in a world of slogans and acronyms. It’s all about the messaging: "Education Reform," "Stand for Children," "Pension Reform," "Student’s First," and the list goes on. The title of each of the aforementioned initiatives appears to be positive for education, teachers, and children. "Appears" is the operative word.

It’s a new world. We are in changing times. It is imperative that we, as educators, sharpen our skills and look beyond the slogan or acronym. What lies beneath the surface is oftentimes a far cry from what appears to be. Warm fuzzy words are increasingly sounding major alarms. Dare I say, many of the so-called reforms are indeed anti-union and not what is in the best interest of public education? In the coming months you, as BTU members, will be asked to take a stand. We, as educators, are for quality education. To that end we at the BTU will be addressing the issues that negatively impact true education reform and the workers.

The BTU is on Facebook. If you are a Facebook member please search for the Boston Teachers Union! If you are not a Facebook member person please consider opening an account in your name. If you are on Twitter, introduce yourself. There are many BTU members who have "joined the conversation!" It is always recommended that you use your real name rather than a pseudonym; it gives your account and statements (all 140 characters) credibility. I advise you to stay away from Facebook and Twitter accounts that use pseudonyms. After all, if you can’t sign your name, should you really be writing it?

Talk to Teachers, Now there’s a slogan worth its weight in gold!

Phone Numbers

Health & Welfare .................................. 617-288-5498
Vision Center ........................................ 617-288-5540
Function Office ...................................... 617-288-3322
Tremont Credit Union ..................... 781-843-5626

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Conversation with a Teacher: Jerry Howland from ACC

Jerry Howland

First of all, thanks for taking the time to meet and talk a bit about yourself as a teacher. You were honored as the state teacher of the year in 1994, and I believe you were one of the four finalists for national teacher of the year this time of year. I was one of four finalists, but I lost the swimsuit competition. I’m sure it was a close call... (laughing)

You also mentioned that you are now in your 42nd year as a teacher—an incredible achievement. And I’m sure there are many, many other honors and recognitions that you’ve received over the years like [fellow ACC teacher] Chris Mee, would be quick to mention as well.

Can you recall the moment you knew you have seen him? (It’s amazing what he does with the 9th grade mind.)

One of the key themes of The Teaching Pulse is an attempt to make conversations around best teaching practices a central focus of our professional organizations. And one way I’m hoping to do that is by talking to some of the best teachers in the district and sharing those conversations with other teachers. So, I hope that the questions help guide us into a great conversation.

How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Can you give a piece of how you approach your work as a teacher in BPS?

Chronologically, I started out as a math teacher and I was teaching at the McCormack Middle School in Columbia Point through the 1970s. I went to Harvard, did a masters in the Education program, and then I went to Jamaica Plain High School as a housemaster (still teaching, but also doing discipline), and then I became a department head of math, science, health and physical education.

I was still primarily teaching math until the mid 80s when I was appointed to teach a law class. In fact, the person who was teaching that class got sick and I took over for the year and started teaching the law program. And by the time English High School moved in, I stayed and I switched from teaching four math and one law class, to teaching four law and one math [section], just the calculus class. The law [course] became a very popular class. And it’s a great course to teach because teenagers have a genuine interest in the law and [to] know what’s fair and what’s right.

I began doing mock trials after a few years. And the excitement [Jerry] generated because of the competition and drama was a clever way to engage kids without them [immediately] realizing that they were doing reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking. And then there was the opportunity to take kids beyond that for those who wanted to do more. We have [for instance] extracurricular interscholastic competitions with Harvard Law School and Suffolk Law School.

I feel that the role of the teacher changed over the years since 1970. They’ve walked that line between doing both... what’s best for the students and best for the teachers. They are primarily working on behalf of the teachers. But I think they’ve done some things over the years that have benefited both.

Economically, any time the economy turns bad, people start turning against each other and competing for fewer resources. So that’s part of the issue now. And also when you negotiate, it’s one of those things where when it becomes public... [a position] may sound absurd because... (continued on page 5)
Ohio Gives Us Hope, But Organizing is the Key

Commentary, Ted Chambers

When it comes to the current political climate and status for teachers in Massachusetts, it would seem that there is little good news to report these days. The attacks against our unions have seemed relentless. But the same can be said for those millions of kids of which we are responsible. As you may already know, the group Stand for Children is putting a question on the ballot next November that, if enacted, will essentially end collective bargaining rights and workpeople always win: by organizing. They came up with a plan and a message. Then they got out and went to the teachers. They mobilized their base by knocking on doors, making phone calls, mailing literature and talking with friends, neighbors and coworkers. They worked relentlessly to get the word out and, in the end, they achieved a stunning victory for working people and the middle class.

The same kind of victory is absolutely possible here in Massachusetts. In fact, we have done it at least three times in the last twenty years (defeating the anti-pre-vailing wage initiative in 1988 as well as two potentially devastating tax roll backs in 1990 and then 2009). But we are going to need a serious campaign in order to defeat this initiative. We need to activate our members and allies. We have to get our friends and neighbors to understand that the Stand for Children initiative is not some homegrown effort to improve the quality of Massachusetts public schools— but part of a Wisconsin-like effort to needlessly undermine collective bargaining that is being advanced by the right wing billionnaire Koch brothers.

And lastly we need to let the public know that, according to the best data available, Massachusetts has the best public schools in the United States and our teachers do not deserve to be cast out of the profession.

The attacks against our unions, our professional rights and the standard of living, are considered to be “too expensive.”

For those of us in our 30’s and 40’s who have made teaching our life’s vocation, the significance of this initiative cannot be understated. If this passes and becomes law, many of us will lose our retirement eligibility, never mind 80%.

Like many workers in the private sector, veteran teachers will be let go not because we are incompetent but because our salaries and benefits (and experience) are considered “too expensive.”

After 15, 20 or 25 years of service, many of us will be cast out of the profession that we love and do very well, never having paid a dime into a social security and eligible for a fraction of the pension that we have nearly fully funded through our contributions, salaries and benefits. In short, the Stand of Children initiative will do us what Proposition 2-1/2 did to an entire generation of teachers back in the early 1990’s.

And now the good news. There is reason to be hopeful. Around the country, working and middle-class citizens and union members are organizing and fighting back against these calculated attacks on our union rights and standards of living. Ohio is a terrific example. The Republican extremist Governor John Kasich and the Ohio legislature passed a Wisconsin-like law that stripped Ohio public employees of nearly all of their collective bargaining rights including seniority and the right to bargain over healthcare costs. On Election Day this November, Ohio voters voted nearly 2 to 1 for a ballot initiative that overturned the Governor and legislators draconian and extremist attacks on public employees.

And they did it the same simple way that ordinary citizens and working people always win: by organizing. They came up with a plan and a message. Then they got out and went to the teachers. They mobilized their base by knocking on doors, making phone calls, mailing literature and talking with friends, neighbors and coworkers. They worked relentlessly to get the word out and, in the end, they achieved a stunning victory for working people and the middle class.

The reason I did that was [in consideration] of the schools I worked at as a teacher. The people I worked for at English High and JP High gave me complete freedom. They let me do whatever I wanted and because they did that, it was my program. So I did more than I would have [than] if I was [just] following someone else’s directions. So I put so much more into it. And I wanted to create the same opportunity here.

Are there any final words you’d like to add within this interview?

I’d say in general, the teachers today are so much better than the teachers that I encountered in college. They’re much more dedicated, more talented... and a big part of that has to do with the desegregation of BPS. When I started teaching, people were in either all white schools or all black schools. And when they were started to be desegregated, [white teachers] started getting kids of color, and a lot of them were unhappy about it. It affected their teaching as they didn’t have expectations for those kids. It was pretty ugly through the 70s and 80s. But because of low expecta-

But those people are gone now. And the people who are coming in? We’re getting a lot more professionally talented people.

And maybe the question is how to get those teachers to remain and continue to have opportunities to grow. But one thing that I’ve always felt is that I’ve always disliked that divide between newer teachers and those who are veteran teachers. If there’s anyway to better connect the two groups, I hope we do it. Hopefully this is a way to do that— to say we’re all teachers in the Boston Public Schools and this is what we’re here for. I hope this also helps to close the gap because people don’t get the chance to see what other teachers are doing, You know how your day goes (laughing).

Yes, I absolutely do. Thanks again, Jerry, for taking the time to do this interview.

For comments and conversation around any issues that Jerry raises, please visit the online forum at www.theeducatingpulse.org.

And if anyone has one of those indoor sunlamps I can borrow in the meanwhile, give me a call.

(James Lion is a Peer Assistant in the Boston Public Schools.)
On Wednesday, November 9, 2011, scores of youth organizers from BYOP (Boston-area Youth Organizing Project), BPS students, BTU members, youth workers, youth activists from several local organizations, and teachers from across Massachusetts joined together in protest of Educrat Michelle Rhee’s $50,000 appearance at the publicly-sponsored Boston Speakers Series at Symphony Hall. For hours, young people and adults joined together in solidarity and marched, chanted, delivered speeches, spoke with Series attendees, and handed out fliers. Most of all, we built power.

In this moment, when the very institution of Public Education is under serious attack, these alliances and (more importantly) actions between young people and their adult educators are not only powerful and beneficial: they are necessary. The wealth class in this nation has privatized everything from prisons and police departments to public parks and community centers, taking them from the community and turning them into for-profit industries on the backs of taxpayers. Now these privatizers have decided to lay their hands on one of the few public entities that remains: our education system.

The attack we are facing is real. It is savvy and well-funded, insidious and powerful. It intentionally aims to divide us. We cannot afford to lose this battle for public ownership; it is all we have left. So we must come together. That night, we did: and we could all see, very clearly, just how incredibly powerful we are when we build together, fight together, and struggle together. As a BPS graduate, the daughter of two BPS educators, a youth worker, and an organizer, the solidarity I witnessed gives me great hope for our school district.

(Caroline Casey, a 2009 Snowden International high school graduate, is a Community Organizer & Youth Worker for BYOP.)
When Opportunity Knocks
by Mary Catherine Gafney

Within any organization, members will not always agree on everything. This certainly holds true for the Occupy Movement. The primary concern of those within our Union who are opposed to this idea is that, while the movement has listed grievances and identified problems, it has yet to formulate any viable solutions.

If we really think about it, the American Declaration of Independence does not actually contain any viable solutions either. After a few stirring lines about truths that we hold to be self-evident, the document primarily consists of a long list of grievances against the King of England. The actual solutions, held first in the Articles of Confederation and then in both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, came much later.

Great movements do not often start with the solutions already worked out. The injustices and wrongs must first be identified and condemned.

The Occupy Movement certainly has identified what’s wrong. We live in a time when corporate money doesn’t just talk, it screams and dictates in a way which affects all our lives as well as the lives and livelihoods of our children. Its corrupting influence has watered down or drowned almost every effort to legislatively improve the lives of children, the elderly, the ill and the working poor.

For thirty years, wages have remained flat while corporate profits and CEO salaries have skyrocketed. Unions have been weakened or crushed, millions of jobs shipped overseas. Every effort to try to help students, workers, consumers or the environment seems to face overwhelming odds under a system that is rigged in favor of giant corporations or individuals with great wealth.

Under the influence of special interest money the very regulations that had successfully governed the banking and finance industry since the time of the Great Depression were removed leading to huge abuses and Ponzi schemes that have nearly wrecked our economy.

When the too-big-to-fail corporations win, they win. When they lose, we bail them out with hundreds of billions of dollars. The aftermath of which leaves the middle class and poor bearing the burden of “necessary austerity measures.” I don’t mind sacrificing if it helps our democracy, but first we have to reestablish our democracy.

The media has continually demonized those of us who work with union protection. The general public seems to have forgotten that as a result of past union movements all working people have benefited. Unions have been on the defensive for so long, debating among ourselves how much to give up or surrender, that we no longer are able to recognize an opportunity to go on the offensive – even when that opportunity is staring us in the face. The Occupy Movement is now providing us with such an opportunity.

There is a wonderful old labor organizing song entitled “Which Side Are You On?”

At this time, we in the union movement need to ask each other and ourselves that same question. (Mary Catherine Gafney is a SESS Coordinator at the Russell, BCLA, and Green Academy.)
Robert F. Jango, a Korean War veteran, retired award-winning Boston teacher, and Editorial Board member of the Boston Union Teacher, died November 15, 2011 at Norwood Hospital. He was 83.

Born in Boston, Mr. Jango was a longtime resident of Dedham. He attended Brightdon High School, where he served as class president and joined the ROTC program.

After the Korean War, he earned a bachelor’s degree at Boston University while working at Sears to support his family. Mr. Jango later received his education degree at Boston State College and then a master’s degree in special education.

Mr. Jango served in Korea during the Korean War from 1950-52 as a corporal with the Marines.

Mr. Jango taught for the Boston Public Schools, including South Boston High School, where he was voted “Teacher of the Year” for the city of Boston during the school busing era. Mr. Jango finished out his career serving on the 12-member Executive Board of the Boston Teachers Union as well as serving on the national 10-member Executive Committee for retirees of the American Federation of Teachers.

He was a writer, photographer, and Editorial Board member for the Boston Union Teacher newspaper. He won many awards for his humorous and poignant stories, including the last recorded interview with Christa McAuliffe.

Mr. Jango was a Boston Braves fan, and he enjoyed playing the piano, doing impersonations, and playing the harmonica.

Mr. Jango is survived by his wife, Grace M. (Dominguez), two daughters, Judy and Regina; two sons, Robert and Richard; and nine grandchildren.

(Boston Herald, November 19, 2011)

The Great Molasses Flood

A historical essay by Bob Jango

On January 15, 1919 in the North End, local residents and workmen were enjoying a rare day of pleasant weather in usually cold and blustery Boston.

Women in tenements hung colorful, wet clothes on swaying, sagging lines and lingered at windows to gossip and chat with neighbors – “Hey Maria, quando tuo figlio guispetto si sposa?” “Non-pensere che si tempo che trovi sono magici!”

Old men stood on corners and talked excitedly in Italian about the Yankee Division coming home from Europe. World War I had ended just months earlier on November 11, 1918.

Lightly clad office workers on noon break strolled casually, soaking up the sun on Commercial Street.

In those days, school kids went home for lunch. At a local elementary school a few blocks up the hill on Charter Street eager “early birds” jumped rope, played hopscotch, jacks, bocce-buck and tag. Knots of sweating, rollicking dark-eyed boys roughhoused it on the asphalt schoolyard despite entreaties and admonitions of bell-clanging, harried teachers on duty.

Suddenly without warning at 12:31 p.m., a huge metal tank, 58 feet tall and 98 feet wide filled with 2,300,000 gallons of molasses exploded on the property of the Puritan Distilling Co. at 529 Commercial Street. Twenty million pounds of the mahogany colored, cement-like ooze cascaded out in an initial wave 70 feet high. Sweeping everything in its wake!

The 1/2 inch steel plates of the huge tank flew through the air like sheets of cardboard on a windy day, shearing supports to the ground. The 1/2 inch steel plate used in construction.

At the nearby docks the Fireboat 31 of the Boston Fire Department was moored. The fire station was lifted from its foundation and smashed like an eggshell. Three firemen were killed instantly.

Court records reveal an interesting statement by the judge “It was nobody’s fault but the public’s, because the casualties could have been worse if it had been in the North End where a twisted vertical construction.”

Pointing to the North End Park, he said. “The molasses was four to five feet high and the fire station ended up in the playground.” We walked over to the ball field and Mr. Corolla stood at a precise point and while extending his arms said, “this is where the tank was.”

Mr. Corolla went back to school that afternoon on January 15, 1919. Fortunately, the Charter Street School was physically unaffected. Mr. Jango later recorded a few blocks up the hill on Charter Street the exact spot where he stood as an 8-year-old when the Molasses Flood hit.

Cellars in the area were literally filled with the ubiquitous molasses even after several days of pumping and for many years, North Enders claimed that on warm days the sickeningly sweet odor of molasses still pervaded the area.

Debris under “the E” on Commercial Street in the North End where a twisted vertical beam lies.

 grandchildren.

(Boston Herald, November 19, 2011)
Almost 40 Years Since Busing, Inequality Still Permeates BPS

by Bill Madden-Fonse

A

well-earned knock on the charter school movement is that many charters “cream” from lower-needs students in poor neighborhoods, leaving higher-needs students to fend in increasingly resource-depleted tradi-
tional public schools. The result is a two-tiered educa-
tional system replete with inequity. Of course, this inequity, however, should be the growing inequality of opportunity – along lines of race, class, gender, and language – within Boston Public Schools. The following is a non-comprehensive description of several sources of inequities within BPS, and recommen-
dations (most of which would cost nothing).

Admissions requirements:

The committee recently announced a new plan to “dramatically increase access to successful schools.” The seven schools targeted for expansion are pilot schools, some of which base admissions policies on an application process. Therefore, the proposal begs the question: “Increase access for whom?”

Under the guise of selecting students who are the “right fit,” application hurdles represent an admissions process that screens out higher-needs students. As the number of seats in pilots, in-distric charterers, and local charters grows, the district’s highest-needs students are increasingly segregated and taught in traditional BPS schools. Thanks to the hard work of dedicated staff, great things are happening at the pilot schools who are dedicated and committed to providing all students with the best education possible. Teaching homogeneous groups of learners is easier, and the assurance of rigorous work is a comfort to middle class parents. In contrast, the 30% of students who are not only the pack leaders in a bell-curve but are the pack leaders in segregation. Because of the stagnant lack of parity between Boston schools, we are a great distance from responsibly meeting the needs of all students. The policies described above are not designed to mitigate inequality and indeed the new student-weighted funding formula, while imperfect, speaks to the District’s commitment to adequately serving all students. But the fact that these mechanisms do not intentionally contrib- ute to inequality in BPS makes them no less damaging. The Boston Public School system is a small ecosystem; decisions made about individual schools and policies impact every other school. In the interest of equality, BPS and the BTO must carefully consider the sum effect of every move they make. Decisions about collective bar-

ing, teacher evaluation, and school expansions and

closings should be weighted with an eye on how they will impact overall equality of opportunity, and in particular, their effect on traditional schools, which are increasingly charged to use diminished resources to serve our city’s most vulnerable students.

In 1974, Judge Arthur Garrity found Boston guilty of operating a school system based on “de facto” separa-
tion. Nearly 40 years later, Boston has yet to achieve an equitable school system. More than just a moral tragedy, the lack of programs that address the needs of students – a move that, if enacted today, would exponen-
tially increase inequality. So we’ll continue to spend more than $1 billion a year on transportation alone, and the extended distances students travel to school lead to higher absenteeism and tardiness, and ultimately, low achievement.

Good intentions and lack of overt racism are not enough to ensure educational equity. Post-Brown v. Board of Education history makes it clear that inequality is the normative potential. This of America public education. In the absence of deliberate policies that target institu-
tional inequality, we can only expect it to grow. (Bill Madden-Fonse teaches 10th grade Humanities at the Urban Science Academy.)

RTC Executive Board Minutes • October 11, 2011

Members present: Anne Broder; Anne-Marie Aducci, Treasurer; Sandy Carle; Larry Connolly; Phil Fasano; Eileen Ganley; Donna Cooley-Hilton; Ruthanne Kennedy; Linda McNamme; Marilyn Marion, Secretary; Leonard Miraglia, Vice Chairman; and Mary Jo Murphy.

Exam schools:

When it comes to resources and class offerings, dis-
tinct exam schools have enormous advantages. Yet the student populations in these schools are not representa-
tive of BPS. Since the 1998 Weissman case outlawed the use of race-based admissions quotas, the population of Asian and Latino students at the Boston Latin School has plummeted. Despite comprising 76% of the district’s overall student body, black and Latino students account for just 37% of BLS’s enrollment. Further, more than 20% of BLS students are in special education programs, but BLS serves virtually no students with disabilities.

Advanced work tracks:

Twenty-four elementary and middle schools currently offer advanced work tracks, which, according to BPS, provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for advanced work programs. If the data reveal enrollment disparities, advanced work tracks should be eliminated.

Student and teacher recruiting:

School choice is an important privilege for students and parents alike. When high achieving schools, however, actively recruit students and teachers from struggling schools, it exacerbates inequality. The district should draft an administrator code of ethics that forbids this practice.

The true measure of a good teacher or school is the ability and willingness to welcome all students – regard-

less of perceived ability – and help them reach their full potential. This is the standard to which we, as a district, should strive.

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The Politics of Selfishness: How John Locke's Legacy is Paralyzing America
by Paul L. Nevin
This is an important book in American political history by Paul Nevin, a former teacher in Boston and a former member of the Boston Teachers Union’s Executive Board. Mr. Nevin is today a successful attorney specializing in labor relations issues. His scholarship is first rate as he traces the origins of middle class democracy in the Protestant rebellions of Calvin, Luther and Knox against the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th and 17th centuries. These rebellions culminated in the Glorious Revolution in England that installed the Protestant monarchs William and Mary in 1688. More importantly it established the principle that the people through their elected representatives could and should choose their rulers.

Justifying these actions a few years later were a trio of philosophers including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jeremy Bentham who paved the way for the political theory of democratic liberalism that Mr. Nevin persuasively argues is ill suited for 21st century America. Indeed he argues that its meta-individualistic creed is paralyzing American politics and destroying the very community that made the U.S.A the hope of the world.

AFL-CIO National Young Worker Advisory Council’s Next Up Summit
by Allison Doherty-LaCasse
Last year, AFT president Randi Weingarten appointed me to the AFL-CIO National’s Young Worker Advisory Council. This council is comprised of young workers from different union across the country. I am the AFT representative.

The council’s role is to act as an advisory board to the AFL-CIO National regarding young workers, rebranding the labor movement, and the education and empowerment of young people in the workplace. The Young Workers Advisory Council also helped the AFL-CIO National Council with this year’s Next Up Summit in Minneapolis, MI.

More than 800 young people took part in the Next Up Summit. This is twice as many as last year’s summit in DC. In four days, the conference organized a jobs rally, picketed a Verizon store – twice, did two community service projects and had an abundance of informative workshops. There were also several high profile speakers including US Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, President of the AFL-CIO Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler, AFTRA member and Rising Hope actor Lucas Nes and AFTRM member and Breaking Bad actor RJ Mitte are just to name a few.

It was a great conference and it has been a truly great experience representing the AFT on this committee. I sincerely hope that there will be several BTU and AFT-MA delegates at next year’s Next Up Summit. For a look at the full agenda and to see pictures and video from this year’s Next Up Summit, please visit: http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/nextup2012/ (Allison Doherty-LaCasse teaches special education at Urban Science Academy.)
Harvard/Kent Elementary School

The Harvard/Kent Elementary School is located in Charlestown, right near the Bunker Hill Monument. It has an unusually diverse population of students, with slightly more than half in so-called “regular education” classes and many immigrant families from Asia and Latin America.

I arrived around noon and found the principal in the most inviting cafeteria I’ve seen in a long time, with walls full of student artwork and inspirational quotes. The five PRIDE qualities that guide the school community were prominently displayed and interpreted by student artwork.

I learned that the third graders were off on a field trip to Belle Isle marsh—a fascinating place (accessible by T) I’d visited with my middle school students many years ago. This was the first of several surprising connections at this school across the city from my JP neighborhood! I met Mary Gaffney on the stairs; a friend, neighbor, and teacher of children with special needs who recently came to the Harvard/Kent from the Marshall. “I know you!” science teacher Theresa Strong, also from JP, exclaimed when I introduced myself. I loved visiting her active classes: fifth graders creating models of their playground after measuring the space and, later in the day, fourth graders trying to light a bulb with a battery and wire.

I usually visit schools in the morning, when language arts and math tend to dominate instruction. On this Friday afternoon students throughout the building were also engaged in a variety of science and social studies activities. Writing and drawing activities enriched all subjects. One class was doing map work and practicing a chant to remember the names of our continent, country, state, and city. Much hilarity attended an end of the day “Simon Says” in a kindergarten class, where learning to follow directions is central to the curriculum.

Hopefully this month’s “We’re Learning Here” photos and captions will inspire you to listen to and share the voices of your own students beyond the classroom. I encourage all of you to make YOUR voices heard, as well!

Ms. Cheng was reading us a story about Columbus. He was an explorer who knew the world was round instead of flat. We learned that he tried to get to India by sailing west, and that he was mean to the native people. He called them “Indians” because he didn’t know he was in the Americas.

—Ms. Cheng’s 3rd & 4th graders

Ms. Clement was helping me write a story about mallard ducks. I like the way they swim. I am learning to read better.

—Wesley Alvarez, Grade 3

Ms. Newton was helping me write a story about a time I was angry. I’m learning to make complete sentences in my writing.

—Nick Robinson, Grade 2

(Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. Her “We’re Learning Here” Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.)
Reason #3 — the BTU has never heard back from the school district on a host of issues, such as SPED reorganization and ELL category training.

Reason #4 — this year is slowly moving forward without Reasons #1, 2 or 3 being dealt with.

Our schools need a contract in place. We need to move on, and the school district’s stalling tactics aren’t helpful or productive towards that end. The district’s failure to provide our union with answers to our proposals is counterproductive. It’s time to Talk to Teachers.

School Rallies Will Help to Jump Start Serious Negotiations

The Message: TALK TO TEACHERS!

(continued from page 1)

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