Excerpts from “A Talk to Teachers”
By James Baldwin

Historical Context: When James Baldwin gave his talk for teachers it was 200 years since the Emancipation Proclamation. Much of the civil rights legislation had yet to be passed. George Wallace, governor of Alabama, was barring black students from the state university. Martin Luther King Jr. had been jailed in Birmingham and four teenage girls had been murdered in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

On the positive side, the March on Washington and King’s “I Have a Dream” speech had inspired a nation, President John F. Kennedy had called for an end to “Jim Crow Laws.” Malcolm X had brought together urban forces in protest. Martin was the conscience of the movement. Malcolm was the passion of the movement. And James Baldwin embodied the anger and the memory of an oppressed people. There was hope and there was possibility.

Let’s begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people – must be prepared to “go for broke.” Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it’s operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determinant of all.

(Boston: A Winter Wonderland)

Whose Judgment Do You Trust – School Policymakers or School Users?

By Richard Stutman

MassINC Poll Shows Urban Voters Overestimate Quality of Their Schools

By State House News Service

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JAN. 25, 2011 – Nearly half of voters in 11 Massachusetts cities give their public schools a grade of A or B and just 12 percent rate their schools with a D or F grade, according to poll results released Tuesday.

“These numbers show that residents in the 11 Gateway Cities do not perceive significant problems with their local public schools despite data that show underperformance in key areas,” Steve Koczela, president of MassINC Polling Group said in a statement.

Eighty-three percent of the 400 registered voters polled Jan. 11-13 gave their public schools a grade of C or higher. Pollsters released the data with a chart showing 63 percent of third graders statewide scored advanced or proficient on the 2010 English language arts MCAS exam, but only 40 percent in Brockton, 37 percent in Fall River, 48 percent in Fitchburg, 45 percent in Haverhill, 25 percent in Holyoke, 40 percent in Lawrence, 41 percent in Lowell, 53 percent in New Bedford, 56 percent in Pittsfield, 30 percent in Springfield and 45 percent in Worcester.

“The concern coming from these poll numbers is that many residents in Gateway Cities may be uninformed – or in denial – about the significant hurdles these schools face,” said Michael Sommers and students with closing the achievement gap,” John Schneider, executive vice president of MassINC, said in a statement...

What a great report! Four times as many Massachusetts voters give their own public schools a grade of A or B than give a D or an F, but we are told that the public’s grade does not reflect the reality of how bad these schools truly are. In other words the policymakers, the politicians, and the business leaders – few of whom probably use those schools – know a lot more than the parents, whom MassINC believes are either “uninformed” or “in denial.”

These voters – they must be stupid – or so MassINC would like us to believe. Perhaps, however, a more accurate headline should have been, “Poll shows that policymakers, politicians and business leaders overemphasize test scores while missing the quality of schools in the city.”

(Richard Stutman)

Teach for America Gets $100 Million Endowment As Schools Across the Country Slash Budgets

Whom do you believe? Is the glass half full or half empty? Well one thing’s for sure: polls have consistently shown that the public likes the schools their own children go to. In fact, our parents like our schools a lot more than policymakers do.

No one is saying our schools are perfect, and no one said that schools cannot change for the better. But there is a lesson to be learned here. We clearly have a situation where people who use our schools like them better than those who judge them. Let me frame this another way. Instead of labeling those who use the schools as either naive or uninformed, might it be more appropriate to label those policymakers as arrogant?

Could it be maybe, just maybe, that those who use the schools, those who work in the schools, maybe know a little more about the schools than those policymakers give them credit for? Put another way, maybe ‘think’ tanks are not as adept as ‘user’ tanks.

1 http://www.massinc.org/PressRoom/MassINC_News/Poll-Gateway-Cities-grade-their-schools.aspx

Teach for America Gets $100 Million Endowment As Schools Across the Country Slash Budgets

What’s Wrong With This Picture?

By Garret Virchick

A s Boston schools enter the “probable organization” phase of the budgeting cycle that happens every year many teachers, especially provisional teachers, are worried that there will be no position for them in the 2011-2012 school year. Once again we are told that we will have to do more with less. Services for students will be cut. And our classrooms will once again be stuffed to capacity (and over capacity) as school buildings are shuttered in the name of fiscal responsibility.

This bleak picture is not worrying Wendy Kopp and Teach For America. Philanthropist Eli Broad and others have provided them with a $100 million endowment. This grant promises to make TFA a permanent fixture on the education landscape, even though many in the field question the educational benefit of the program. Is it just me...or is there something wrong with this picture?

You’ve seen the bumper stickers. “Wouldn’t it be nice if education got all the money it needed, and every time the military wanted a new bomber they had a bake sale?” Maybe we need a different one. “Wouldn’t it be nice if corporations paid their fair share of taxes so public
I have a question for all veteran teachers: Why are you still teaching? It certainly isn’t for the praise you receive in the media. Nor is it the plush environments in which we toil. Perhaps it is the family-friendly schedule. Maybe it is a personal vendetta against an adrenaline junkie who thrives on making the impossible happen using lesser recourses than MacGyver. If I were to guess, I’d say that you have stayed in teaching for the same reason I have: our work has a positive impact beyond the daily lessons.

I’m sure you all have your own story or two to share.

I have three actually. All three are current students whom I tutored in the past year or two via the BPS’s Home and Hospitals Program.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Home and Hospitals Program, it is a multi-functional department offering a variety of support services. I have worked on and off for the department over the years as a home tutor. In that capacity I tutor students who are too ill to attend school but who are well enough to learn. My job is to deliver their assignments from their schools to their homes, tutor them with the assignments, and then shuttle the completed work back to their schools.

Assisting students is always a pleasure. Ironically, home tutoring can make my regular job at Boston Latin Academy a bit aggravating. For after assisting sick children with their studies, they are in different grades, they overcome different health issues, and they all work harder than the average student. Watching them prosper is inspirational.

Even parent-teacher nights were different this year. When the parents of these students filled our waiting room, we didn’t talk about grades.

We became reacquainted and renewed conversations that were begun at their kitchen tables. While their children are doing well academically, the only thing on their minds was “Thank God my child is healthy.”

So this Valentine’s Day I have a new reason to love my job. And while it is depressing to read about Washington D.C.’s latest Race To The Bottom scheme or Beacon Hill’s latest round of consolidations, I can see that students – when given support – can and do flourish. I walk into my classroom these days not to find something new to complain about but to find new ways to be thankful for what I do and what I have. I am proud of these kids and am thrilled that the BPS does such a great job ensuring that an illness does not mean an interruption in a child’s education.

Michael J. Maguire

**Commentary: A New Reason to Love My Job**

**The Nightmare of 2010**

The year 2010 came to a close with sadness and anger for nine schools, their children, parents, and staffs. The School Committee, with its collection of “giants for public education” supported the closure of nine schools and the merging of several others. The Mayor stood safely in the background and applauded his gang of republicans for their hard work and difficult decision in the school closures. They victims of their vote sat motionless and cried for the loss and devastation of their educational communities and school families. The vote cemented the effectiveness of the Mayoral token school committee.

Mr. Thomas Menino, as was his intention, was again held “harmless.” It is impossible to ascertain the damage this group of pseudo public servants perpetrated on the children and staffs of the schools that were destroyed so cavalierly. At the School Committee meeting in December the parents, parts and staffs truly thought they had an opportunity to sway the committee members’ vote. In favor of Superintendent Carol Johnson’s all-concluded closure plan. The hard facts rose to the surface after the committee members described the savings that this round of closings and consolidations would provide. You would have thought by their prepared speeches that this vote would have closed the entire $65,000,000 budget gap!

The committee, however, was as cold as the weather when the final vote was taken. They saw the hours of emotionally charged pleas from the public and then navigated the path laid out for them by the Mayor. Merry Christmas.

Mayor Menino, the true architect of the school closings, had earlier informed the Boston business community that his school committee was in the bag and not to worry about the vote. If you find my claim bullish, I invite you to read his speech for yourself.

Perhaps the most damning thing to come out of the closing procedures was the December 2, 2010 email from Marc Kenen to his fellow charter school supporters. That email gleefully gloated of a charter school with city officials who would orchestrate so that the newly closed schools would be realigned for “charter schools.”

Our school committee and Mayor (one in the same) are more concerned about building a legacy than lifting public education. How many times have we heard that Mr. Menino is the “education mayor”? He has just demonstrated that he is soley concerned with his aura of being one of the top mayors in this nation. So when the school committee had no idea how they would pull off the school closings without losing Mayor’s support. The schools chosen were in communities that had always blindly been in his political camp.

My prediction is that the mayor will next be a salesman for the proliferation of charter schools to fill the void he himself created. You can count on numerous press releases supporting his vision and courage. The Globe will give him adulation for doing what is best for the city. The business community will thank him for thinking outside of the box, and especially for redirecting public funds. The public should thank him for unabashedly supporting the business model.

Truly, it is easy to point out the flaws in our superintendents’ “Redesign and Reinvest” program. When I first learned of this new educational revelation, I thought it had some possibilities. What happened next was perplexing. And like many others that have originated from that office, they has changed... and not for the better.

This latest program has morphed into unjustified school closings and changes seen in the past several years under the mayor’s stewardship! Where are the adjustments that the school system made as cost rose and funding disappeared? How have the people that she administration showed the leadership necessary to change before the situation became cataclysmic? This “redesign” is no different than past administrations realizing that the cost was not amortized. During public hearings, the cuts and closings were presented as the only way to prevent continued funding shortfalls. How do we believe “redesign” is not putting us on the precipice of a financial disaster in the next financial cycle?

Yet the name Gamester is in the calculations are correct and not skewed with assumption. The term “Reinvest” implies that there is something to invest. In the school committee meetings, the members admitted that they did not have sufficient money to make the classrooms productive. Yet there was never a thought from one member of the school committee to ask for increased funding. In every meeting each school committee member spoke to the need to tighten our virtual financial belts.

Veteran educators (teachers and headmasters) thought this was déjà vu, as no one could remember any other scenario. This group could not remember when they had not needed to adjust for fiscal shortfalls. There is absolutely no faith in the calculation’s system’s ability to provide fiscal stability when that stability is in the sole control of one person, the Mayor.

The Mayor has been open in his assault on the public school system and the public employees of his city. He has openly voiced his opposition to any education plan that would diminish his control of the schools.

Maybe this is the year that the mayor does what is right in the school committee and the public superintendents so that he can reduce the distortion of his orders.

In short, he still wants to bear the title “superintendent of the Boston Public Schools.”

(Charles R. Johnson is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Boston Teachers Union.)
How do I transfer out of my school?

Permanent teachers are eligible to participate in the transfer process. Human Resources projects (Superintendent’s Circular HRS-E12; Staffing, Reassignment & Hiring for SY 2010-11) that the transfer list will be on the MYBBS HUB intranet system or on about March 2nd for 20 working days after the posting on their website. This website will be the only means of posting salary and transfer information. Teachers must be active online to view the transfer list. Do not rely on the hard copies.

The contract states, “Positions held by provisional teachers with a letter of reasonable assurance shall be eligible to apply for transfers to their own positions under the transfer process. However, any permanent teacher who seeks a position to which a provisional teacher has applied under this section will be granted an interview with the School Site Personnel Subcommittee.” It is mandatory that the SSC Personnel Subcommittee of each school screen and interview candidates from the transfer list.

Contract language details, “Teachers may be considered for transfer in any subject area in which they recently… even if they do not hold an active Boston program area; however, a school’s Personnel Subcommittee shall not be required to select any such individual.” “In cases where there is only one applicant for a vacancy in the transfer posting, the personnel subcommittee will not be required to hire that single applicant, and the vacancy will go into the excess pool.” “Transfers will take effect the following September, unless the posting otherwise provides.” “…In the event that a position sought through transfer no longer exists on the effective date of transfer, the person seeking the transfer shall remain in his/her position if the vacancy had not been posted.”

The transfer list is the opportunity for candidates inside BPS to apply for other BPS teaching jobs. Applicants fill out the on-line data which is transmitted to HR, screened and then sent to each respective school. I suggest in addition to the mandatory on-line process, you also actively pursue these job(s) by contacting the principal at the prospective school by crafting a strong cover letter highlighting your specific skills as they relate to programs at their school. Do some homework about the school and reflect that knowledge in your cover letter emphasizing your attributes and their applicability to the specific job opening at their school.

Teaching a career means to maintain adequate funding. Doing whatever they need to do to close to all it can be, at least so long as it wishes to maintain its size and shape. As it wishes to maintain its size and shape and as a result, want to know how you as a skilled team player will help raise those test scores and contribute to a positive school culture going forward. Update your resume. Send/hiring copies of it to the interview. I’ve heard teachers ‘assume’ that Court Street sends the prospective school ‘all of their info’ so that they arrive empty handed to interviews. Court Street does not send any information before the data you fill out on-line to apply. If you have a portfolio, it is a good idea to bring it along as well. If you haven’t developed one, start to collect exemplary samples of work, projects you’ve done, curriculum you’ve developed, etc. and bring this along with you to interviews to help illustrate your attributes and to distinguish you from the pack.

How does the Personnel Subcommittee of the School Site Council work?

The Personnel Subcommittee of each school’s School Site Council interviews and decides on the selection of permanent teachers whether they transfer into the school. They are encouraged to participate in the hiring of all teachers into the school, but are only mandated to do so during the first teacher transfer posting at this time according to the contract. SSC Personnel Subcommittees also recommend new athletic coaching appointments at each school. In addition, school-based New Teacher Developers will be selected from the qualified pool of eligible teachers at that school by the School Site Subcommittee.

The Personnel Subcommittee is made up of two teachers and one parent from the SSC, as well as the Principal/Headmaster/Program Director. SSC teacher members, elected who among them will be the two representatives to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee. Teacher and parent representatives on the SSC Personnel Subcommittee may designate temporary replacement representatives according to the position being filled. These temporary replacements do not need to be teachers of their school. For example, a Special Education teacher may request a teacher on the Personnel Subcommittee when a special education position is being filled. The teachers who are SSC members designate temporary BPS teacher replacements on the Personnel Subcommittee if they choose too. The Principal does not select the BPS members to serve on the Subcommittee: As in all SSC decision-making, members of the Council and its Subcommittees are urged to reach decisions by consensus. Decisions need to be formalized by majority vote with the Principal/Headmaster/Program Director voting with the majority.

What is job-sharing and who can participate?

The BTU will hold a Job-Sharing Info Session at the BTU on Monday, March 7th, from 4-6, where all people interested in participating may attend to gain information and to assist in finding a partner. Eligible participants in the program are: all permanent BTU members including teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, counselors, etc.; provisional once they have been hired for the next school year, and substitutes once they have received a provisional contract.

Job-sharing is when two eligible partners split a single job in a manner agreed upon by them, and together both partners will be hired and paid as one teacher. The partnership must approve the job-sharing to occur as well as how the logistics are carried out. Job-sharers each must work half time. As a result, they earn one-half the pay, full health insurance and health & wellness benefits, one-half of the allocated sick and personal days, for retirement purposes a job-share year is treated as half a year. Typically, the two partners together will work the entire 170 hours of professional development and must attend both parent conference nights and all professional development days.

When one job-sharing in their own school, retain attachment rights to that site. The visiting teacher who is job-sharing retains attachment rights to their former site for one year. If the visiting teacher job-shares at a school other than their original site for more than a year, they lose their attachment rights back to that site. In order to apply for and to receive literature from the BTU and the School Department about job-sharing, you must fill out an application of interest form through the Office of Human Resources Circular.
On Monday, January 17, 2011, a consortium of religious and civic organizations organized the 41st annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Breakfast in Boston. Despite the coldest temperature in a year, nearly one thousand people gathered to honor the achievements of one of America’s greatest citizens.

The theme for this year’s breakfast was Not a Day Off but a Day of Service. Various guest speakers from politicians to pastors stressed how Dr. King served his fellow man both from his pulpit and in his politics. They urged us to keep MLK’s spirit alive by not avoiding work on this holiday but instead by helping out others in our community.

In recognition for their outstanding civic commitments, five hardworking BPS students were awarded $2,500 each in scholarships. The winners were Kevin Chan, Marleah Cunnins, and Jade Arnold Scott from the John D. O’Byrant HS; Sandy Germain from the Jeremiah E. Burke HS, and Vashti Desroches, from Madison Park Technology and Vocational HS. These students were chosen based upon their submissions to an essay-writing contest.

Also honored for their artist talent were Orchard Garden students Jonuel Laboy, Antonio Martin, Julienne Perez Torres, Janez Pinedo, and Edna Ramirez. This year’s artistic theme was What Dr. King’s Dream Means To Me. Their art was on display at the breakfast for all to see. A special thank you went to their art teacher, Mr. Chris Plunkett.

As usual, the Boston Teachers Union contributed to the event by purchasing a table. In attendance were Richard Stutman, President; Caren Carew, Secondary Field Rep.; Brenda Hyde, Kenny ES; Marilyn Marion, retired; Carolyn Tabor, Peer Assistant; Sharon Watson Beck, Taylor ES; her daughter Sharnique Beck, alumna of Hernandez ES and TechBoston HS; and Michael Maguire, BLA.

The BPS was even present in the music of the morning. Singing for the crowd was recent BLA graduate Jessica Johnson. Ms. Johnson is currently studying at Berkley College of Music.
mined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won’t happen. …Now the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education actually occurs in a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society… The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world itself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the unanswerable, is the way individuals achieve their own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society… Now, if I have tried to sketch has any validity, it becomes thoroughly clear, at least to me, that any Negro who is born in this country and understands the American educational system runs the risk of becoming schizoid. On the one hand he is born in the shadow of the stars and stripes and he is assured it represents a nation which he never lost a war. He pledges allegiance to that flag which guarantees “liberty and justice for all.” He is part of a country in which anyone can become president, and so forth. But on the other hand he is also assured by his country and his countrymen that he has never contributed anything to civilization—that his past is nothing more than a record of humiliated gladly endured… All this enters the child’s consciousness much sooner than we as adults would like to think it does. As adults, we are easily fooled because we are so anxious to be fooled. But children are very different. Children, not yet aware that it is dangerous to look too deeply at anything, look at everything, look at each other, and draw their own conclusions. They don’t have the vocabulary to express what they see, and even if they try, their elders, know how to intimidate them very easily and very soon. But a black child, looking at the world around him, though he cannot know quite what to make of it, is aware that there is a reason why his mother works so hard, why his father is always on edge. He is aware that there is some reason why, if he sits down in the front of the bus, his father or mother slaps him and drags him to the back of the bus. He is aware that there is some terrible weight on his parents’ shoulders which menace him. And it isn’t long—in fact it begins when he is in school—before he discovers the shape of his oppression… … I began by saying that one of the paradoxes of education was that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society—if you think of yourself as an educated person. And on the basis of the evidence—the moral and political evidence—one is compelled to say that this is a backward society… Now if I were a teacher in this school, or any Negro school, and I was dealing with Negro children, who were in any care only a few hours of every day and would then return to their homes and to the streets, children who have an apprehension of their future which with every hour grows grimmer and darker, I would try to teach them—I would try to make them know—that those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies by which they are surrounded, are criminal—I would teach him that there are currently very few standards in this country which are worth a man’s respect. That it is up to him to change these standards for the sake of the life and the health of the country. I would suggest to him that the popular culture—as represented, for example, on television and in comic books and in movies—are based on fantasies created by very ill people, and he must be aware that these are fantasies true. He should also be taught that he who is taught the press he reads is not as free as it says it is—and that he can do something about that, too. I would try to make him know that just as American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it, so is the world larger, more daring, more beautiful and more terrible, but principally larger—and that it belongs to him. (Delivered October 16, 1963, as “The Negro Child—Its Self-Image,” originally published in The Saturday Review, December 21, 1963, reprinted in The Price of the Ticket, Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985, Saint Martins 1985.)

Legislatures have fallen all over themselves positioning themselves for Race to the Top funding by opening the floodgates and letting in more and more privatized charter schools. But how long before schools start to be opened with names like Exxon-Mobil Green High School or Goldman Sachs Charter High School for Young Entrepreneurs? The economic crisis the world is currently experiencing has sparked countless protests. Students in England have stood up as the government has tried to increase education fees. Cuts in education have moved students in Italy to occupy the Leaning Tower of Pisa demanding adequate funding. February is Black History month. The fight for a good public education has been at the center of the African American experience. As we struggle this year and next year in underfunded public schools trying to do right by our students we need to remember the words of Frederick Douglass, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

Teach for America Gets $100 Million Endowment As Schools Across the Country Slash Budgets… (continued from page 3)

Merit Pay: A Bad Idea in 1947, A Bad Idea Today “A t a time when the United States should be engaged in a thorough democratization of its own school system, in order to demonstrate the democratic process to a war-torn world, the very foundations of the democratic structure of our school system are threatened by the proposal to base salaries on rating and thus throw teachers’ salary schedules wide open to political control and manipulation. It is highly dangerous to American democracy to attempt to place the education of children on a production line basis or to weigh the services of teachers in the same manner as a marketable commodity in industry.” “No measuring device has ever been invented, or ever will be invented, by which supervisors or school administrators can determine exactly how many dollars one teacher is better than another. On the other hand the basing of teachers’ salaries on rating schemes would place in the hands of school politicians a powerful weapon by which the freedom and initiative of the classroom teachers would be seriously curtailed and political bootlicking, rather than professional efficiency in the classroom, would be encouraged.” “The so-called merit rating system in the public schools is an attempt to apply to American education the incentive plans which have resulted in such gross exploitation of workers in American industry.” (Excerpts from 1947 AFT pamphlet entitled “Should Teachers’ Salaries Be Based on Rating?”)

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Where’s John? – SPED Faculty Senate Snubbed by Assistant Superintendent

On January 20th at the BTU over 40 seats were filled with teachers, ETF’s, related service providers, para-professionals and school psychologists. One seat was conspicuously empty. That was the seat expected to be filled by John Verre, the new BPS Assistant Superintendent for Special Education. In mid-December John Verre had accepted an invitation from the SPED Faculty Senate to come and introduce himself, share his vision for changes to special education and to take questions from the audience. This meeting was advertised for over a month and many BTU members were looking forward to an open exchange of information and views. Less than a week before the meeting Verre left a phone message saying that he could not come because items that are being discussed in negotiations for our new contract could come up. The chair woman of the SPED Faculty Senate quickly responded that he should come anyway and that we expected his right to decline to comment on any questions related to negotiations, but it was a problem. This is a common practice for both administrators and union officials during negotiations. Verre did not return this phone call.

We are very disappointed that John Verre did not feel that he could come and speak to the women and men who spend 5 days a week working with students with special needs. He missed the opportunity to present his new vision for special education, which we now hear about only in bits and pieces, second or third hand. If he respects the work that we do, if he wants to have school staff included in the development and implementation of new ideas and to ensure special education programs, this was not the message he sent.

And what were some of the questions that Dr. Verre felt might have compromised BPS’s position at the bargaining table?

- What are the plans to make improvements in specialized services called Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) for our autistic students? Currently teachers report that parents are concerned about getting more services in the home. Students are waiting too long for evaluations and starting services.
- How can we make transportation for SPED students safer? Transportation concerns include among other things the lack of seat belts for students who have bolted off the bus and are not safe without seat belts.
- We began the year with a new format for writing Individual Education Plans. The old manual was no longer to be used. Training was minimal or nonexistent and we are still waiting for more systematic and uniform information to be provided to all. What is the plan to address this?

- Some SPED students participate in a summer program that helps them maintain the gains they make during the school year. Are there plans to monitor the quality of the summer program and provide more materials and support?
- Changes in how to determine caseload numbers for related services providers have been brought up at negotiations by the SPED Administration. We had hoped to learn about Verre’s vision for changes he feels would improve the effectiveness of how related services providers deliver their services and what this might mean for caseload numbers. This is a question that Verre could have addressed generally without taking numbers or declined to comment on.

- One of the things many of us have heard is that Mr Verre’s new vision includes a big emphasis on inclusion. We have some experiences and have concerns like the need for adequate room for specialized equipment (i.e. prone stander) that we had hoped to share.

- What should teachers or other staff do if IEP’s, which are legal documents, are not being implemented as written (i.e. combining classrooms) or classes are overcrowded?
- The Office of Instructional Technology used to provide excellent trainings to teachers and related service providers that brought knowledge and tech equipment to the classrooms. Teachers needed help and support in modifying the curriculum for severely handicapped students. We would like to know when we can expect more professional development opportunities that are specific to the needs of special education students.
- And of course there was the question about what will happen next year if the ETF positions are eliminated. Who will do the work ETF’s currently do? Will there be adequate training? How can we afford to lose the expertise and skill of these professionals? But again— we made it clear that Verre could have declined to comment on this.

- Are these questions so threatening that they would negatively impact contract negotiations? We don’t think so. These are questions that we should be asking and having a discussion of these issues and others could only help the tone of negotiations by establishing a feeling of working together and mutual respect. These are key to providing the best possible learning environment for our students and that would be a very favorable outcome of negotiations. We again invite John Verre to join us at a SPED Faculty Senate meeting to share his vision for needed changes in special education and to address our questions and concerns. We do really believe that establishing relationships and opening up communication will benefit everyone, especially our students.

- The SPED Faculty Senate

Greater Boston Labor Council, AFL-CIO Futures Committee

Organizing Our Future

Saturday, February 26th

Join us Saturday, February 26th as we ‘Organize Our Future’ to foster and develop the skills of young union members to lead the next generation within the labor movement.

Saturday, February 26, 2011 • 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. • Boston Teacher’s Union

180 Mt. Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125

For more information, contact Rosa Blumenfeld at 617.723.2370 or at rblumenfeld@gblic.us

BTU DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

This year there will be 16 scholarships in the amount of $1,000 awarded to high school seniors who are dependents of BTU members. To apply, please obtain an application from Jeanne Turner in the Union office or download the form from the BTU website. The deadline to apply is April 22, 2011.

STUDENTS, including children, nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews of RTC members. One of these scholarships is earmarked for a student who might choose to attend a children, nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews of RTC members.

Does someone you know work at a charter school?

AFT Massachusetts needs your help reaching out to employees of Massachusetts charter schools in order to share with them important information regarding:

- A voice in decision making
- Quality professional development opportunities
- Job security
- Competitive salaries and benefits
- Classroom resources

For more information, contact Dan Justice at justice65@gmail.com or call 802-324-5886.

Learn more about AFT’s Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff by visiting: www.aftacts.org

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For more information, contact Rosa Blumenfeld at 617.723.2370 or at rblumenfeld@gblic.us

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While the pension benefits of current recipients are fairly safe, those of future recipients are the subject of pending legislation that will severely decrease their value. The increased employee contribution in base benefits on the highest five-year average instead of the highest three-year average, to use a factor of 0.80/3% instead of 0.1% for each year of service, will increase the retirement and full retirement ages from 55 and 65 to 57 and 67 respectively all but wipe out the early retirement benefits of the 2001 legislation – though the increased employee contribution of 11% remains in place. Proposals are also becoming advanced to cap the total pensions to a maximum of $88,000 per year – not too much higher than some highly paid teachers are eligible for currently. Remember, with inflation, that $88,000 may not look so high in a decade or so.

The only bright spot in the whole pension argument is that Boston retirees MAY finally get a COLA increase – including retired teachers. While all other teachers in the state are under the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System and considered state employees, retired teachers fall under the jurisdiction of the Boston Retirement Board. We asked Michael McLaughlin to get a ruling on where the retired teachers fall and the Retirement Board attorney researched the law and ruled we were covered under the recently passed 2010 legislation that allows municipal systems to grant annual COLAs of up to 3% on up to the first $16,000, instead of $12,000 as was the previous limit. The board has not scheduled a hearing date on that vote as of press time but if we receive enough advance notice, we’ll try to arrange bus transportation from the BTU to City Hall so our members may attend. Keep posted.

The biggest financial threat retirees as well as active city employees face is the attack on their health insurance benefits. Mayors and town administrators statewide are demanding “plan design” on health benefits just as the Commonwealth has through the Group Insurance Commission (GIC). This would remove health insurance from collective bargaining and allow the city to increase employer and employee/hospital copays as well as employee premium contribution anytime and to any amount in excess. Many workers and retirees under GIC saw huge increases in the past year to cover state budget shortfalls and there was no collective bargaining to mitigate the cost.

The outlook for winning the battle on health insurance looks bleak. In the event that we miraculously are able to persuade the City Council and the Legislature not to remove the collective bargaining provision on health insurance, the mayor along with the Mass Municipal Association have said they will seek to put on the ballot in 2012. You can be sure that every kid who got a detention in grade 5 or speeder who got a ticket for going 75 in a 35 mile zone, will vote to get even! The bill will pass overwhelmingly, and the Globe will applaud the harried taxpayers who did what they needed to do to keep food on the table.

While the odds are not on our side, we must not capitulate. If we roll over on this, the next assault on our hard earned benefits starts the next day. Retirees must support the active members and they must support us as quickly as the active employees move into the retiree category. Also, those retirees who attended our huge Pension and Health Insurance Fair in April of 2009, heard the head of the Boston Retirement Board tell us that our pensions were “safe” as they represent a contractual obligation on the part of the city BUT retiree health insurance is not contractual and is a good will benefit given to retirees basically out of the goodness of his heart. Hopefully, that heart does not break – especially if you do not have MEDICARE to fall back on!

Richard Stutman has been接触 Jain. AS a Bridge to Retirees. He provides transportation and lunch to us on the five times we went to Beacon Hill to lobby the Legislature and Governor as well as for our Pension and Health Insurance Fair in 2009. We still need his support as we try to maintain and improve our benefits. However, he also needs our support now more than ever, to continue advocating for active and retired members. You may be called upon to lobby our elected leaders as you did so effectively in our past Day on the Hill events. If you get an increased COLA in July, remember your voice made it happen. We hope when the call goes out for help, all the 650 BTC members who went to Beacon Hill in 2008 and the over 1200 members who attended the Pension and Health Benefits Fair in 2009, will answer the call. Remember, the benefits you save, may be your own!
There’s at least one moment every few days when I think to myself: “Teaching really is the best career in the world.” Sometimes this thought is spurred on when a student finally understands a concept. Other days it’s activated by the zing of a vibrant classroom discussion. Sometimes it comes from the unadulterated joy making a tough text like Shakespeare accessible. But, in the case of this winter, my teacher euphoria came from our DOUBLE SNOW DAY off from school!

Before diving into grading and planning (yes, we still work during days off, but it’s a lot cozier in PJs), I couldn’t resist taking a walk around the neighborhood to capture the beauty of icy Boston. Come walk with me and check it out!

– Lillian Marshall, Boston Latin Academy