Unfair Tax Structure Leads to Revenue Shortfall

By Richard Stutman, BTU President

Recently a friend of mine who has been overseas for five and one-half years was in town for a short visit, and while we spent the better part of the day at our usual haunts (haircut, lunch and Costco’s) we talked about how things have changed in America over the last half decade. My friend’s visits have been sporadic over the last few years – but still enough for him to sense the changes and new mood in this country. “I don’t know enough about the Occupy movements,” my friend said, but “something just isn’t right with the country. The rich are getting richer, and everyone else is fighting each other for crumbs. And by the way right with the country. The rich are getting richer, and everyone else is fighting each other for crumbs. And by the way, while we spent the better part of the day our current leaders have been overseas for five and one-half years. My friend recently a friend of mine who has been overseas for five and one-half years when he visited us. “I don’t know enough about the Occupy movements,” he said, “but something just isn’t right with the country. The rich are getting richer, and everyone else is fighting each other for crumbs. And by the way, while we spent the better part of the day...”

The income gap (aka. the poverty gap) is widening. In fact, it has probably never been wider. In the last 25 years, 81.7% of all wealth gain has gone to the top 5% in this country, with the top 1% gaining 40.2% (Economic Policy Institute (EPI). After a tax rate targeting those in the top income tax brackets would be a step in the right direction. There’d be plenty of benefits therapeutically – to jump start the economy; and there’d be less pressure to raise taxes on the middle class. From 1936 to 1990 the top marginal tax rate never fell below 70%. Today’s top marginal rate is 35%, half of where it was as recently as three decades ago. Why is this not a subject of discussion?

Efforts to nudge up the marginal tax rate seem quite meek and benign in this historical context. Exacerbating tensions as class warfare – this is just misdirection. To install a fairer tax system is not somuch about redistributing wealth—it is about finding resources and raising revenue to pay for creating jobs and providing needed goods and services. The number of unemployed and underemployed Americans has risen from 10 million to 27 million in the last 11 years. Our infrastructure—schools, bridges & roads, public transportation—are sorely in need of repair and upgrading. Basic health care for many is unaffordable. And tens of millions of people live day-to-day. A fairer tax structure would be a sensible step. But that hasn’t been the case. In fact, it doesn’t even seem like part of the discussion. Instead of looking for real solutions to get our country back on track, our leaders gaurrel about small issues and go after crumbs.

Our state just lowered the income tax rate from 5.3% to 5.25%, and that’s big news. The average taxpayer will save around $3 per year. According to the Mass. Department of Revenue, People who need the money – those in the lower income brackets will save around $30 per year. And this is news?

A more informed news item would have added that Massachusetts residents actually pay significantly less in taxes on a percentage basis than their counterparts around the country. But no one wants to hear that in a down economy. So forgive this some real context, consider the following: taxes in Massachusetts are actually quite low. Ouch.

In considering the total Mass state and local tax burden as a share of personal income, Mass ranks 35th in the country, below the large states (California and New York) and the small (Louisiana, West Virginia, and Maine). (see http://www.massbudget.org/report_atwood_bb23.htm). If our tax rate even approached the US average, it’d mean an additional $2.2 Billion in state coffers – enough to create some jobs, begin to fix our schools and improve our public transportation system. (The new casinos, by contrast, are expected to raise on the order of $300 Million per year, about 1/7 as much.) So this brings us to my friend’s last point: that unions have become the country’s bogeyman.

People don’t want to hear that we need to raise more in taxes, for they fear their own taxes will go up. That’s the standard storyline they’ve been sold. Tag – you’re it. The other side of the equation – the side that says there are many additional sources of revenue if only we’d look for them – is never told. The only other place to look for revenue is to seek savings... and that leads to the other storyline: the public sector unions have driven up the cost of government spending.

So we see a never ending spate of articles directed at the public sector: our pensions and our health care costs are too high; our salaries unsustainable; police details too unnecessary; fire department shift-switching too extravagant; and so on.

In this context it’s easy to see how unions have been scapegoated. And all the explaining in the world (e.g. union members actually pay for 92% of their own pensions) doesn’t seem to matter.

So how does this end? Public sector unions either come up with a plan to fix our economy, raise revenue fairly, and spend it wisely – or we will continue to be targets.
Commentary, Garret Virchick

Data Driven Destruction

Or When Did Schools Start Taking Better Care of the Numbers Than the Students?

It's a new year. A time for hope. A time for reflection. A time for new things. Unfortunately, my burning passion to change the world, the same passion I brought into teaching 25 years ago, will sustain me during these dark days of data driven destruction.

Oh, I know what you are saying. Not another doom and gloom editorial. People don't want to see that. People want to see solutions. Call me old fashioned (and smarmy). But solutions cannot be formulated until the problems are named. From there we must ask questions. This is the basic scientific method. The solutions to the problems we all face - teacher, administrator, parent, student - cannot be determined unless we start asking the right questions.

Twenty-five years ago, when I first entered the profession, the questions we asked were very different from today. How can I keep my students onto learning? We were teachers filled with passion to make a difference. Starting with the question many of us designed courses and lessons that were not scripted. At another school we were designing an integrated approach to teaching science and developed year long courses in Energy, Matter, and Change Over Time. Everything we did stressed depth over breadth. We realized that real learning only happens when students can explore something deeply, without interference from pacing guides.

Fast forward to today. I rarely hear that question anymore. "How can I turn my students onto learning?" has been replaced by "How can I get my students to pass the test?". Two very different questions that lead to very different solutions. The first one is measurable by data. Is there a test to see whether a student will develop into a lifelong learner? The second can easily be measured by data. But what do these numbers really mean?

Campbell's Law states, "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort what the indicator is intended to monitor." This is an application to social science in the cliche in physics. Not to get all science teacher on you, but Heisenberg uncertainty says that the very act of measuring affects what you are measuring. In other words, the tests we administer to purportedly measure the achievement of our students is affecting the achievement of our students.

We see how this corruption happens. Spending time in our classroom teaching test taking skills. Teaching to the test. Cheating scandals being exposed all over the country. Replacing depth with breadth. Scripted curriculum that purports to be "aligned with the standards" replacing more open ended teaching that allows students to make errors. Segregating the harder, more expensive children to teach under funded schools so as not to affect the test scores of boutique charter schools. The corruption of teaching and learning, which has always been a complicated act, by the expediency of data driven education.

Unfortunately the exposure of this corruption has not made a dent in the juggernaut that is rolling over our schools. Many of the leaders of our schools have accepted this model. I often hear that things were so much worse before the tests. There was no accountability. At least now we have a standard they say. And that's a point. But determining policy based on the lowest common denominator is poor policy at best. Good teaching, and the learning that comes with it, cannot be legislated. And when measurement distortion that teaching and learning is it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are not a jet setter who can leave the gray skies behind on a whim in search of sand, surf and sun.

However, you can and should visit the websites of the leading California newspapers, No, I'm not asking you to log on to your computer on the East Coast, just pay attention to the daily weather predictions. I am asking you to read and comment on their editorial pages.

Early Editions

Before the Boston Globe changed its electronic format a couple of months ago, it used to put up its editorial page around 10:00 p.m. That allowed me time to check "moreover" editors before I went to bed and it granted me the opportunity to be the first person to comment on a story.

Being the first to comment on a story sometimes means you can set the tone for the ensuing discussion. Call it spin or re-direction, but early comments make others think differently about an editorial, story, or column.

We are educators, so let's educate the general public on what a policy or proposal actually means to us in our schools. We don't need to be nasty or smarmy about it. We just need to tell a fuller story than the ones often presented in the papers.

Later Editions

As the Globe now publishes its online editorial page after midnight, the Herald does so even later. But there is a treasure trove of untouched pages just waiting for your input; it's called the Golden Coast.

When you log on to your computer on the East Coast, it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be a 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are the first person to correct any misconceptions that might infect the minds of millions of unsuspecting citizens.

Imagine the possibilities with thousands of us shaping the thoughts of the left coast crowd. And shape their attitudes we must.

Pop Culture

From Richard Nixon to Proposition 8, California is as much a political hotbed as it is a cultural one. The Hollywood sign may loom high in the hills but it's the ballot initiative process that casts the longest of shadows.

Some say initiatives are a pure form of democracy. But, as we are seeing with Stand For Children, initiatives can be used by millionaires to further their political agenda. We don't have as much money as Stand (which bragged about buying massive political influence in Illinois in 2011), but we do have thousands of local, state, and national members.

California is worthy of our focus due to both its time zone and temperament. We can add our two cents before we head off to school, and we can adjust the political discourse of our nation's largest state.

We want our brothers and sisters in CA to thrive. We want our state to be the envy of the country. Replacing depth with breadth. The factory schools of the 1920s are under funded schools so as not to affect the test scores of boutique charter schools. The corruption of teaching and learning, which has always been a complicated act, by the expediency of data driven education.

Unfortunately the exposure of this corruption has not made a dent in the juggernaut that is rolling over our schools. Many of the leaders of our schools have accepted this model. I often hear that things were so much worse before the tests. There was no accountability. At least now we have a standard they say. And that's a point. But determining policy based on the lowest common denominator is poor policy at best. Good teaching, and the learning that comes with it, cannot be legislated. And when measurement distort that teaching and learning is it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be a 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are not a jet setter who can leave the gray skies behind on a whim in search of sand, surf and sun.

However, you can and should visit the websites of the leading California newspapers, No, I'm not asking you to log on to your computer on the East Coast, just pay attention to the daily weather predictions. I am asking you to read and comment on their editorial pages.

Early Editions

Before the Boston Globe changed its electronic format a couple of months ago, it used to put up its editorial page around 10:00 p.m. That allowed me time to check "moreover" editors before I went to bed and it granted me the opportunity to be the first person to comment on a story.

Being the first to comment on a story sometimes means you can set the tone for the ensuing discussion. Call it spin or re-direction, but early comments make others think differently about an editorial, story, or column.

We are educators, so let's educate the general public on what a policy or proposal actually means to us in our schools. We don't need to be nasty or smarmy about it. We just need to tell a fuller story than the ones often presented in the papers.

Later Editions

As the Globe now publishes its online editorial page after midnight, the Herald does so even later. But there is a treasure trove of untouched pages just waiting for your input; it's called the Golden Coast.

When you log on to your computer on the East Coast, it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are the first person to correct any misconceptions that might infect the minds of millions of unsuspecting citizens.

Imagine the possibilities with thousands of us shaping the thoughts of the left coast crowd. And shape their attitudes we must.

Pop Culture

From Richard Nixon to Proposition 8, California is as much a political hotbed as it is a cultural one. The Hollywood sign may loom high in the hills but it's the ballot initiative process that casts the longest of shadows.

Some say initiatives are a pure form of democracy. But, as we are seeing with Stand For Children, initiatives can be used by millionaires to further their political agenda. We don't have as much money as Stand (which bragged about buying massive political influence in Illinois in 2011), but we do have thousands of local, state, and national members.

California is worthy of our focus due to both its time zone and temperament. We can add our two cents before we head off to school, and we can adjust the political discourse of our nation's largest state.

We want our brothers and sisters in CA to thrive. We want our state to be the envy of the country. Replacing depth with breadth. The factory schools of the 1920s are under funded schools so as not to affect the test scores of boutique charter schools. The corruption of teaching and learning, which has always been a complicated act, by the expediency of data driven education.

Unfortunately the exposure of this corruption has not made a dent in the juggernaut that is rolling over our schools. Many of the leaders of our schools have accepted this model. I often hear that things were so much worse before the tests. There was no accountability. At least now we have a standard they say. And that's a point. But determining policy based on the lowest common denominator is poor policy at best. Good teaching, and the learning that comes with it, cannot be legislated. And when measurement distort that teaching and learning is it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be a 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are not a jet setter who can leave the gray skies behind on a whim in search of sand, surf and sun.

However, you can and should visit the websites of the leading California newspapers, No, I'm not asking you to log on to your computer on the East Coast, just pay attention to the daily weather predictions. I am asking you to read and comment on their editorial pages.

Early Editions

Before the Boston Globe changed its electronic format a couple of months ago, it used to put up its editorial page around 10:00 p.m. That allowed me time to check "moreover" editors before I went to bed and it granted me the opportunity to be the first person to comment on a story.

Being the first to comment on a story sometimes means you can set the tone for the ensuing discussion. Call it spin or re-direction, but early comments make others think differently about an editorial, story, or column.

We are educators, so let's educate the general public on what a policy or proposal actually means to us in our schools. We don't need to be nasty or smarmy about it. We just need to tell a fuller story than the ones often presented in the papers.

Later Editions

As the Globe now publishes its online editorial page after midnight, the Herald does so even later. But there is a treasure trove of untouched pages just waiting for your input; it's called the Golden Coast.

When you log on to your computer on the East Coast, it's still the wee hours in California. Your 6:35 a.m. comment here will be 3:35 a.m. comment there. Odds are you are the first person to correct any misconceptions that might infect the minds of millions of unsuspecting citizens.

Imagine the possibilities with thousands of us shaping the thoughts of the left coast crowd. And shape their attitudes we must.
What Happens if There is No Heat in My Classroom?

The contract is clear on this issue. A classroom must be heated to at least 60°F. If the temperature falls below 60°F, or whenever the temperature or climate becomes too oppressive, the teacher can request to be reassigned.

Report and record the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy for yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available space that is heated adequately as well as remedy the heating problem in your classroom. 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 to have the heat restored. Teachers should file a Step 1 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 the entire school is without heat and it has been reported to the School Department, please contact the BTU office as well.

In addition to a primary program area (PPA), do I also have an active alternative program area (APA) in BPS if I have a current Mass. license on file at Court Street in case I want to transfer into a position using that certification?

No. In addition to having an active license in the subject area you are currently teaching in or your primary program area (PPA), you must apply for your other current licenses on file at Court St to become “active” in Boston. To do so, you must fill out an Application for Additional Program Area(s) in Boston Public Schools’ Superintendent’s Circular [attachment 1] of Human Resource Superintendent’s Circular [attachment 2] of Human Resource Superintendent’s Circular HRS-HS-7 “Staffing, Reassignment and Hiring for School Year 2112-2013” which must be submitted on or before January 15th. In order for the active license to be considered an APA in Boston, one of the following criteria must be met, in addition to submitting the above mentioned application;

- Your state cert must be 5 years old or less. This means you need to have obtained it for the first time, not just recertified it, within the last 5 years.
- Submit 15 course credits [grad or undergrad] earned within the last 5 years, which are relevant to the cert area.
- A current score on the National Teachers Exam earned within the last 10 years.
- Two years of teaching experience within the last 10 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 currently teach in the 1993 Massachusetts Educational Reform Act, even if they do not hold an active BPS APA Program Area; however, a school Personnel Committee 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 hold-over 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 a school that teaches a subject area. This APA process was negotiated in order for the BPS to ensure the teacher be ‘current’ in the subject area in question. The BTU attempted to eliminate or de-emphasize this antiquated process this past year, but the School Department wanted too much in return for agreeing to do so which would have further limited teachers flexibility and rights. We couldn’t settle for that!

If I’m a permanent teacher, can’t I voluntarily excess myself from my building and go to the Excess/Reassignment Pools?

The contract reads, “No teacher may voluntarily excess themselves without the approval of the director of Human Resources.” In order to attempt this, a permanent teacher must fill out the form Reassignment Request Superintendent’s Circular [attachment 2] of Human Resource Superintendent’s Circular HRS-HS-7 “Staffing, Reassignment and Hiring for School Year 2112-2013”. The application asks the teacher to return the form to the Principal of their school. A teacher is welcome to do so, however, in order to ensure the application is received by the deadline at Court Street, the teacher should submit it directly to HR, as well as the Principal.

If you are a permanent teacher at a pilot school the contract reads, “Employees shall work at a pilot school on a voluntary basis and may excess themselves at the end of any school year.” Pilot school teachers should also fill out the voluntary reassignment application and submit it directly to HR. Permanent pilot school teachers do not need approval from HR or their Principal to excess themselves. The same is true of permanent teachers in Turn Around, Lowell Charter, and Innovation schools none of whom have attachment rights and not only can excess themselves any given year utilizing this form, but also can be excessed by administration any year with no reason required to be given.

What effect does an unsatisfactory evaluation have on a teacher’s ability to transfer or excess themselves?

The contract states, “Any teacher who has received two interim overall unsatisfactory evaluations between September and February of that year may be rejected for transfer by the SSC Personnel Subcommit tee.” The operative word is may – it does not prohibit the school-based SSC from considering said candidate. Another effect of an unsatisfactory evaluation according to the contract is, “A teacher receiving an overall annual performance evaluation of unsatisfactory will have no voluntary excessing rights for the following school year.”
BTU Members Celebrate the Holidays With Their Children!
Happy New Year! In the vein of starting off of 2012, I’d like to volunteer one of my personal resolutions: to try and break the automaticity of writing ‘2011’ on any writing surface, paper or otherwise, by the end of the month. I’ll let you know how it goes. (Riveting, isn’t it?)

Now let’s get to the good stuff.

For the last two column articles, I was happy to present interview responses from our union president Richard Stutman, as well as forty-two year teaching veteran Jerry Howland of Another Course to College. I have another two, excellent interview transcripts forthcoming as well, one from a senior policy advisor to Secretary Duncan and one from another teacher-leader in BPS. Both had thoughtful, provocative things to say. Definitely stay tuned.

This month though, I wanted to spend some time in consideration of the Other.

What do I mean by that?

Consider the multiplicity of the typical, practically pre-folded divisions that can be named right off the bat in the realm of public education. Younger teachers and what they want, as opposed to veteran teachers and what they want. Traditional public schools versus charter schools. Schools and students with good test scores on one side, and schools and students with poor test scores on the other. Labor interests as represented by the Boston Teachers Union, versus management interests as represented by the Boston School District.

Lines drawn, sides identified and positions hardened.

And doesn’t the capital Other almost bring alien-like beings to mind? It emphasizes a particularly formed set of opinions, biases and positions with completely oppositional characteristics – as if the Other is a golem formed from an entirely different river’s clay. (That one is inspired from Michael Chabon’s excellent book, The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay. Do check it out!).

The Other, in other words, is the result of a kind of groupthink that’s substantiated, and then perpetuated; it’s a way to make sense of a complex environment. We all do it. It’s about identity, about orientation and even can stretch to moral convictions of what is right and what is wrong. Politics, anyone?

The problem, however, is the following: while identifying Otherness can help us begin to make sense of complexity, it does very little to meaningfully resolve it – or perhaps more accurately, to build (as opposed to tear down) within that complexity. Effective and meaningful change, one that keeps students at the center of the conversation, while also balancing the needs and interests of multiple constituencies, has to lie in the vast area between the drawn lines of Otherness.

So what can we do about it?

It’s no secret that I’m a believer in collaboration, as both an operational tone and strategy, to effectively improve our work in our classrooms and schools – and beyond that, in our school district and the public education system at large.

I also know, like you certainly do, that it’s a lot harder than it sounds. It’s not simply a matter of scheduling an extended group hug, alter all (although I think that would be something else to witness. Everyone put your arms around the person next to you and smile! Squeeze gently! Do it again!). And just consider the complications and mistrust that always swirl around education policy concerns, in particular the translation of education policy to its often-unsteady manifestation on the ‘shores of our classrooms.”

I do want to suggest, however, that positive momentum builds off of small, core successes and exemplars. And that if we as teaching professionals want a place at the decision-making tables, our union itself needs to reflect collaborative, barrier-reducing approaches as central to the professional organization. There are potent opportunities for our union to make collaboration around teaching and learning a true hallmark of our work together – collaboration that involves, and even depending on, participation from and partnership between all teachers, new and veteran.

BFTeacher Robert Tobin of the Mary Lyon pilot school and Bill Maddelen-Fuoco of the Urban Science Academy suggested the same in their Diary of a New Teacher articles from the AFT Advocate earlier this year. Reflecting on his initial mistrust of the union, Robert concluded with the following:

...We have a responsibility to our students. I still believe education is the single most important variable in many kids’ lives. But now I believe in being part of the union union, not just in name but also in action. We need to support each other and to push each other. We don’t need public outcry or district evaluations to improve. We need to share our successes with our colleagues and to improve our weaknesses by learning from colleagues. Every teacher has something to offer and every teacher can improve. We need to continue to improve, as a strong union of professionals.

We are part of a union, we benefit from our fellow union members, and we need to ask if they are benefiting from us.

Compelling, isn’t it? What opportunities and structures can our union create to facilitate this type of sharing and learning within our schools, and between them, across the city?

For example, would love to hear how Bill is doing with vocabulary instruction improvements that he referred to in his own article, and his newly-adopted ‘Flagged for Success’ experimentation related to student data and strategic intervention.

In language, in structure and deed, let’s do something to address one of the core questions of this Teaching Pulse forum:

How can we build membership interest, involvement and investment in the Boston Teachers Union as an organization focused on teaching and learning in the classroom?

As Bill similarly ended his own written reflections, Let’s talk about that.

As always, please consider visiting the online forum at www.theteachingpulse.org to offer your reactions, thoughts and suggestions. All the best and here’s to a great beginning of 2011... er, 2012.

(James Liou is a Peer Assistant in the Boston Public Schools.)
Boston Educators Attend New Education Conference in Beijing, China

A group of 18 Massachusetts teachers, and University of Massachusetts, Boston professors, spent approximately ten whirlwind days visiting schools in China, meeting students, talking to and hearing from educators and education leaders and attending the International Summit for New Education Conference in Shanghai, Beijing and Chengdu to which we were all invited guests and participants.

The majority of educators and administrators represented Boston Public Schools, this including myself, and fellow NTD Alicia Carroll. As we began the journey, my thoughts clustered around our groups mission to enlighten our Chinese counterparts on methods of inspiring democracy, innovation and creativity in their classrooms. However, it didn’t take long after arrival to gain concrete awareness of the quiet revolution occurring in Chinese education. This awareness evolved through the many school visits and interactions with our Chinese counterparts, and policy makers, including Professor Zhu Yongxin (Leader of New Reform Movement).

China’s Education Reform Movement

New Reform began in China approximately 15 years ago in 1996, and according to Chinese scholars, China presently has 1,642 experimental zones where New Education Reform is occurring, with 40-50% of students in the same grade feeling the effects of this change. New Reform is the Chinese government’s 8th major initiative in Chinese history, and is evident in their two-pronged approach: (1) New Basic Education and (2) New Education Experiment. Each experimental school is permitted to have has its own distinct roles and characteristics. New Basic allows for the general public and allows professors to take charge, while new experiment encourages network interaction, open democracy, academic spirit and common development of teachers and students.

A process of decentralization in planning curricula is occurring within the Chinese educational system through new reform efforts, and more power is being delegated to local school districts and universities; however the overall system of education remains top down with the Chinese government directly controlling 74% main universities. As such, this may impact local school districts, by impeding the creativity and innovation in curriculum and instruction sought by experimental schools.

New Reform Schools we visited in Shanghai and Beijing

I was our good fortune to visit a few of these top Experimental schools such as the South campus of the Hutang Central Primary School and the Hutang Experimental Schools in Shanghai and Beijing. No. 2 School and Taiyan–Jiaashu Primary School in Beijing. Our Massachusetts group of educators was privy to observing firsthand this movement being nurtured. An initial stark observation is that Chinese policy makers funding these public experimental schools produced some amazing modern facilities that rival most of our public schools and even independent schools in the US. Unfortunately, in comparison the majority of our urban public schools are not of similar levels. Examining student work and saw entire classrooms abounding in artifacts that honor both teaching and learning, including historical collections of student and teacher artwork, notebooks and related teaching and learning paraphernalia.

At Beijing No. 2 High School, democratic principles are reflected in frequent debates, examined student work and saw entire classrooms abounding in artifacts that honor both teaching and learning, including historical collections of student and teacher artwork, notebooks and related teaching and learning paraphernalia. In addition to our visit and observation notes, our group read numerous articles on the topic of educational change in China and the US, held discussions amongst ourselves and asked questions to our hosts, and made several discoveries. One of which is about curricula; local school districts are responsible for approximately 10% of the curriculum, while 90% is directed by the central government. I contemplated how this might impact both our Chinese counterparts? Did they feel pressure in terms of having to meet both the national curriculum expectations and New Reform curriculum expectations?

Chinese Teaching Counterparts.

Chinese educational system is the same the modern structural standards of the schools visited. On a purely visual level, a reoccurring theme of creativity was present throughout all the schools visited through numerous examples of student artwork. This fostering of a creative climate focuses on harmony between nature and education. For example at the Hutang Elementary School, there was an entire glass encased classroom built to reflect a Disney-like indoor forest representing what children might see in nature, following a constructivist model where students develop knowledge by making meaning of the representations in this room. At the Hutang Experimental Exam School, creativity is the focus at in an elaborate end of the year art festival where parents participate and have a history of strong involvement with the school, particularly through this event. At Hutang we also met sta-

Confucian principles are prominently displayed at New Reform.

How is New Reform focusing on creativity and innovation in combination with mastery teaching learning?

The evidence we gathered indicates that Chinese educators are making strides toward creativity and innovation in curriculum and instructional practice, with the majority of overt evidence in student artwork, music programs, sports
programs and the creative climate imbued within the educational structures at each school. We also learned that New Reform Schools have an extended learning day by about 2 hours. As a result students and teachers are stretched for time and although everyone enjoys and believes in New Reform goals and programs, they too feel overwhelmed by the expectations of these schools. Many parents expressed their identification with American writer Amy Chua of Tiger Mom fame and feel enormous pressure to have their children be academically successful while children are exhausted with the additional classes they must take in order to pass benchmark exams.

The International Summit for New Education 2011 was a gala affair held in Shanghai attended by over hundreds of educators with smaller conferences in Chengdou and Beijing.

The entire UMass Cohort.

Alicia Carroll and Daiwaittee Balgobin of BPS observe a New Reform Elementary School classroom.

The University group was divided into two sections of an administrator group led by Dr. Jack Leonard and a teacher group led by myself. I introduced our group and provided some background and history of Boston Public Schools and had the opportunity to share our Dimensions of Effective Teaching. Afterwards, six teachers presented their individual projects to showcase how we foster democracy, creativity and innovation in our collaborative inquiry project using art to extend writing stamina and other topics covered by BPS teachers on the panel included Math and the Common Core presented by Daiwaittee Balgobin of the Timilty Middle School and James Lane of Boston Latin School. All presentations were well received and in particular that of NTD Alicia Carroll as Integrated Curriculum is currently a hot topic in China.

Our meeting with Mr. Josheng Li (Executive President of China Education Daily)

Our final group meeting with Mr. Josheng Li was informative as he summarized the efforts of New Reform, and was somewhat critical of urban American education. During this meeting, we had an opportunity to ask questions, and I inquired about the schools and students that we did not see on this trip: urban migrant children and whether these populations receive a new reform focused education? Mr. Li’s response was, “We cannot use American key to open Chinese door.” In essence I agree with Mr. Li that we cannot make parallelisms between education in China and American education based on the schools and populations we visited on this trip. We have a myriad of variables to address in our classrooms, which were absent in the schools, and populations that we visited in China. However, I do believe a relevant learning for American educators is that we can tap on some of what works from our Chinese counterparts and make innovations to our curriculum and instructional practices. After the return to Boston and reflection on our trip, I dare refer to Mr. Li’s statement and respond: “We cannot use a Chinese key to open an American door, but we can use it to weaken the lock.” As we all know we are in a race to the top that is mostly fueled by the need to meet international standards. This is evidenced by the Massachusetts core standards in Math and English, which are aligned with international standards. Unlike the general perception that the Chinese are solely focused on tests cores, our progressive Chinese counterparts recognize the importance of stressing standards while promoting moral education, innovation and creativity. I propose that as we strengthen standards, we uphold the overall premise of Boston’s Dimensions of Effective Teaching, and celebrate the original thinking our students bring, due to the diversity and yes even the adversity within our schools. It may be that a focus on standards whilst promoting the Arts and a climate of creativity in schools is one way to secure our students academic potential.

A Final Word

In Boston Public Schools, like many other urban schools in the United States we face the challenge of educating diverse groups of students with variables of race, disability, language and class. Chinese New Reform Schools are providing an avenue for students to achieve their unique potentials without the challenge of many variables of diversity. My hope is that the admirable work of New Reform will be shared among the masses, particularly the marginalized groups of rural and urban migrant children whose special schools we did not see while on this trip.

(Submitted by New Teacher Developer Julie Panchamasingh-Barakat.)
Because It's Good Politics: Angela Cristiani

**Rapid Response**

Candidates say public education is a “top priority.” The translation is simple, public education is political. Messaging is a key component in every political campaign. Media monitoring and rapid response is common place in all political campaigns. Knowing that public education is a “top priority,” there is any question that a team of teachers can positively and correctly get the word out? Of course they can! The BTU Rapid Response Team is grass roots and will convert; organize, outreach, and response. All synonymous. All political. Our Rapid Response Team is different from others, though… it is compromised of real people using real names. No pseudonyms.

The breakdown for Rapid Response includes, but is not limited to, the following individual teams…Letter to the Editor Team, Radio/Talk Show Call-In Team, Online Article/Comment Posting Team, and Social Media/Networking Team (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). Regular informational updates with talking points and messaging on federal, statewide, and local issues that impact teaching, public education, and the students with whom we work will be provided regularly to Rapid Response Team members.

When advocacy is needed for key political issues on those occasions when the BTU receives little notice of a legislative hearing or vote, members of the Rapid Response Team will be notified.

The goal is proactive communication allowing for open, honest, and direct communication. Most significantly, BTU members are helping shape the message in an authentic, candid way. Teachers are doing what they do best, teaching… only they are doing so in a communication. Most significantly, BTU members are helping shape the message in an authentic, candid way. Teachers are doing what they do best, teaching… only they are doing so in a meaningful way that public education is political.

Angela Cristiani

**Stand for Children Ballot Initiative: Harmful to Students, Unfair to Teachers**

At the heart of being a teacher is being an advocate for children. In partnership with parents and the entire school team, teachers work tirelessly to ensure that students get the support and resources they need to be successful in school and life.

Unfortunately, an organization called Stand for Children (SFC) has filed an initiative petition that would dramatically diminish the professional voice of teachers in schools. The initiative is likely to appear on the Nov. 2012 ballot.

Stand for Children claims that the initiative will “promote excellence in public schools,” but a closer examination shows that it will have the opposite effect: It could drive great teachers from the classroom and will silence teacher voices at the expense of children.

The initiative could drive great teachers out of the classroom.

- The initiative would change current law so that an experienced teacher who loses his or her job because of a school closing, layoff, or program/position cut would lose all rights to another job in the district.

- Under the proposed initiative, the displaced teacher could enter a new school only if the principal in the new school “agrees(s) to the hiring and assignment.”

- The above is true even for teachers with outstanding track records and multiple years of strong evaluations.

The initiative would tie key layoff and personnel decisions to a brand-new, yet-to-be-tested evaluation system, robbing teachers of due process rights along the way.

- The initiative would change current state law so that, in cases of layoffs or program/budget cuts, decisions about which teachers go and stay would be primarily determined by evaluation ratings.

- This change would come at a time when the state is rolling out brand-new and untested teacher evaluation regulations. For this, and other reasons, Mass. Secretary of Education Paul Reville has said the ballot initiative “is not well timed” and “would not be helpful to our efforts to improve evaluation and execute a variety of other educational reforms.”

- The new regulations require that teachers receive one of four ratings for overall performance: exemplary, proficient, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory.4

- Therefore, under the initiative, a teacher with 25 years of experience who is rated “proficient” could be let go ahead of a two-year teacher who is rated “exemplary,” even though the difference between proficient and exemplary may be miniscule.

- What’s more, the initiative gives a teacher little or no ability to appeal a rating, and no ability to appeal a layoff decision. This means that, in cases of staff reductions or school reorganizations, a teacher could be effectively terminated based on alleged performance flaws—even minor ones that the teacher has no opportunity to dispute or rectify.

The initiative, by removing due process rights, would severely restrict teachers’ power to advocate for children and better school policies.

- Current workplace protections – including the requirement that an employer show “just cause” before terminating a tenured teacher – exist so that teachers can advocate for educational quality without fear of retribution.

- But, under the SFC initiative, one not-quite-perfect evaluation – which the teacher has no right to challenge – could cost an experienced, high-quality teacher his or her job in cases of staff reductions or school reorganizations.

- Removing due process for teachers in this manner would have a chilling effect. It would rob teachers of their power to speak their minds freely, since doing so might result in a lower performance rating and a greater risk of job loss.

- Particularly vulnerable might be higher-paid teachers, teachers with health issues, teachers with family obligations, outspoken teachers, or politically active teachers.

The initiative would severely limit teacher voice in the design of evaluation systems.

- The SFC initiative would drastically roll back teacher bargaining rights, allowing school committees to ultimately impose on teachers a non-bargained evaluation system.6

- Thus, the initiative would attach huge stakes to evaluation ratings while removing the right of teachers to have a guaranteed role in evaluation system design.

- Imposing a teacher evaluation system would not only be unfair and top-down; it would likely rule out peer assistance and review (PAR) and other innovative approaches to evaluation that emphasize support and improvement, not “gotcha.”

- Teachers and their unions want rigorous and meaningful evaluation systems, but should also have a say in their design.

---


2 See Section 5 of the initiative.

3 E-mail from Secretary Reville to the Working Group for Educator Excellence, Nov. 19, 2011

4 Read the full regulations at http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr35.html

5 Section 2 of the initiative provides a limited re-evaluation process solely for teachers rated unsatisfactory; final decisions lie with the superintendent. No appeals are permitted for teachers rated proficient or needs improvement.

6 See Section 2 of the initiative.
Pensions

Recent changes in public pensions, for the most part, have a negative impact on public employees. For example, where as a current employee retiring at age 60 after 20 years of service would receive 60% of the average of his/her highest 3 consecutive years, new hires will only receive 43.5% of the highest 5 consecutive years. This means the factor of 1.45% per year instead of 2.0% per year reduces the pension by 16.5% and the use of another as of 1/1 of the pension for a loss of 17.25%. Again, this does not affect anyone currently employed.

The law also increased the COLA base for state pension systems retirees to $13,000 from $12,000. It excludes municipal retirement system retirees since legislation passed last year allowing such systems to increase the base to $16,000. Boston teachers and all City employees are in the "municipal" State Retirement System which last year by a 3-2 vote refused to increase the base. Many other "municipal" retirement boards did increase the COLA base for their employees last year.

Health Insurance

Despite a frontal attack on health insurance benefits, the coalition of City unions was ready to fight. We fought and we achieved. The Coalition successfully defended what it already had and was able to augment it. The coalition knew that with each change made, except for a minor increase in premiums, preserved our health insurance base. The coalition’s strategy was to fight every proposal with a proposal of its own. In most cases, the health insurance proposals were defeated or watered down, and those that were approved were fully financed in the coalition’s base.

By the time you receive this issue of the Boston Union Teacher, you should have already received notification from the City of Boston of scheduled workshops on these changes. The dates are January 12, 2012 and January 24, 2012 from 1-3 at the BTU. If you are Medicare eligible you should plan to attend one of these workshops as you will have to join Medicare or you may find yourself with out health insurance. For those enrolled in Medicare and enrolled in one of the City Medicare plans, you probably will not have to do anything as you are already compliant with the new regulations. However, read all letters from the City Health Benefits Office carefully to protect yourself.

If you are 65 or over and not Medicare eligible you must follow the directions in the letter sent out to you from Medicare. You must visit your local Social Security Administration Office and have them fill out the Medicare Health Insurance Application Form that has been sent to you and return it to the Health Benefits Office at City Hall. All questions should be directed to the Health Benefits Office, Room 807, Boston City Hall, 617-635-4570 and not to the BTU. This is your sole responsibility.

The Medicare Open Enrollment date is different than the Health Insurance Open Enrollment date. If you do not enroll in Medicare in the 3 months prior to the month of your 65th birthday or 3 months after your 65th birthday, you can only enroll during the Open Enrollment period – usually January 1 to March 31 for coverage effective July 1 of that year. There are exceptions such as persons still covered under a group policy as a result of current employment – but there are few. If you miss the Open Enrollment period, you will have to wait until the next Open Enrollment period.

A final note on Medicare, not everyone pays the same Medicare premium. As a function of the “hold harmless” provision, the base premium this year varied depending on whether you enrolled prior to 2010, during 2010, or during 2011. Also, for those enrolled prior to 2011 but paying the premium directly because they receive too little a Social Security benefit, the “hold harmless” clause does not apply and they paid the higher 2011 premium. Additionally, those who have an income of over $85,000 ($170,000 for a couple) pay premiums of over $150 to $350 per month. The City of Boston reimburses 60% of the Medicare premium you pay regardless of the amount. However, it does not pay you more than the base amount unless you notify Group Insurance, and it automatically reimburses you for 50% of the base premium. To get full reimbursement, contact Group Insurance at 617-635-4570 and ask specifically for Diane. She will put you on the list for receiving the form for the full 50% reimbursement of the base premium each January. You must complete the form and send a copy of the Form 1099 SSA (if any part of your Social Security is withheld) and/or a copy of the bills you receive from Social Security showing the amounts due for Medicare. Then in July you will receive the full 50% reimbursement for premiums paid in the previous year.

Retired Teachers: Updated Eyeglass Benefit

The eyeglass benefit will consist of one complete pair of single vision or bifocal eyeglasses. The standard category of frames is available in this program at no cost to the members. Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include designer Metal frames at no cost to the member. The co-payment for the upgrade items.

Updated Eyeglass Benefit

Effective January 1, 2012 the benefit will include design...
do seem to know each other’s sleep number. And, if the school departments continue to look to outside agencies as their new way of recruiting teachers then how much longer until they start using the _Personals_ to find what they consider to be the most promising candidates? Is it too much of a stretch to think that a thin person with no education would be placed in a low-income setting where they have been required to complete TFA does expect these new recruits to make a whole two-year commitment to their new profession. After all, once you’ve successfully ferreted out the best and the brightest and spent 25 days training them two years of the most powerful people in the country. Recently, TFA received $100 million in federal and private grants for their efforts in supplying some of the nation’s schools with very limited training. Unfortunately, I would have thought we had cut loose some of our best educators and turned to what this entire hiring policy is intended to do: drive down the cost of educating students. And that means staffing schools with less costly and experienced educators. But will that make schools more successful? Absolutely not! I challenge anyone to show me a profession where inexperience is more profoundly valued. If you or one of your loved ones is facing major surgery do you want to place your trust in a doctor who hasn’t performed any operations? Where else would an employer say “Let’s review the resumes of all the candidates and pick the one that’s blank.” The watch. But what you also have to do is see what this is happening to public education. As most of us are aware of the marriage between major private companies that provide schools with money, support, and legislative clout from one side of the aisle and show off their political clout with more money and political power, the school departments now want you if you don’t have any experience but wants you to go mark of you once you gain some. I doubt that many of us would feel much relief if we heard this after settling into our seats, “Ladies and gentlemen welcome to American Airlines Flight 109. This is your captain speaking and for those of you new to flying welcome aboard. This is my first time in an aircraft as well. Now buckle your seatbelts and let’s have some fun.” However, we should not fall prey to any struggle that pits old versus new. It’s divisive. It is not only important to bring in new people. It’s essential. All organizations need new members to remain intact. They often bring fresh ideas and a different approach with them. But this isn’t about veteran teachers and those new to the profession. Once again, it’s finding a way to save a few bucks even at the expense of the students we teach and the motivation is fueled purely by a financial bottom line. So, don’t allow yourself to feel animosity towards others who have joined our ranks and have been trained through non-traditional methods. They are our colleagues and face the same problems as our colleagues and face the same problems that we always need. Now buckle your seatbelts and let’s have some fun.”

### A Tree Grows In Mattapan (Actually Eighty Trees)

**Thanks to the work of teachers and students at Boston Adult Technical Academy**

_Boston Adult Technical Academy (BATA) got a lot greener on October 23rd with the generous donation of eight trees by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)! Throughout the last three years, building representative Sean Hudson and BATA students have added flower beds, bird feeders and garden plots to the school grounds. This addition is the single largest landscape improvement thus far on the BATA campus, which is located in the former Pauline Shaw building on the corner of Norfolk and Morton streets in Mattapan. BATA was a night school that operated out of Madison Park – the school serves a population of approximately 280 nineties to twenty-two year olds.

The tree species include one each of the following: American Sycamore, White Dogwood, Beech, Red Oak, Silver Maple, Ginkgo, Eastern Redbud and Norway Spruce. The planting was done to reinforce students learning on the carbon cycle and photosynthesis in the Ecology unit. All five sections of Mr. Hudson’s Biology class participated in the planting.

Beyond campus beautification, BATA will now enjoy improved air quality, a reduction in water runoff and more food and shelter for animals. Recognition and many thanks go out to Eric Seaborn, the director of urban forestry at the Department of Conservation and Recreation. To any BPS faculty interested in obtaining trees for a BPS campus, contact Eric at 617-626-1468, or eric.seaborn@state.ma.us.

Hector Moreta (student), Eric Seaborn (Department of Conservation & Recreation), Kenneth Almodin (student)

---

**Personal Ads to Add Personnel**

Frankly, I’m quite saddened by what I see is happening to public education. As someone who was fortunate to grow up in an era where veterans were looked upon with the stability to our schools I find it appalling to see it erode into a continuous turning of new faces intent on short-term commitment. In my opinion it is ludicrous to think that a two-year stint at teaching will help close the achievement gap. Two years isn’t enough! For god sakes it took two me that long just to get a key to the bathroom. You simply need more time and students need as much continuity as we can give them and that means dedicated professionals who intend to stick around for a while. Considering that over the past decade almost 60 percent of newly hired educators leave within three years, it was a good thing that President Obama did not arrive at Tech Boston by helicopter when he visited last year as it would have been an embarrassment to see several teachers from that school clanging to the landing skids hoping to be air lifted to away. Unfortunately, I am not the type to decipher what this entire hiring policy is intended to do: drive down the cost of educating students. And that means staffing schools with less costly and experienced educators, but will that make schools more successful? Absolutely not! I challenge anyone to show me a profession where inexperience is more profoundly valued. If you or one of your loved ones is facing major surgery do you want to place your trust in a doctor who hasn’t performed any operations? Where else would an employer say “Let’s review the resumes of all the candidates and pick the one that’s blank.” The watch. But what you also have to do is see what this is happening to public education. As most of us are aware of the marriage between major private companies that provide schools with money, support, and legislative clout from one side of the aisle and show off their political clout with more money and political power, the school departments now want you if you don’t have any experience but wants you to go mark of you once you gain some. I doubt that many of us would feel much relief if we heard this after settling into our seats, “Ladies and gentlemen welcome to American Airlines Flight 109. This is your captain speaking and for those of you new to flying welcome aboard. This is my first time in an aircraft as well. Now buckle your seatbelts and let’s have some fun.” However, we should not fall prey to any struggle that pits old versus new. It’s divisive. It is not only important to bring in new people. It’s essential. All organizations need new members to remain intact. They often bring fresh ideas and a different approach with them. But this isn’t about veteran teachers and those new to the profession. Once again, it’s finding a way to save a few bucks even at the expense of the students we teach and the motivation is fueled purely by a financial bottom line. So, don’t allow yourself to feel animosity towards others who have joined our ranks and have been trained through non-traditional methods. They are our colleagues and face the same problems we do. Our beef should remain with the organizations that place them and who act as educational prophets when actually they are more intent on seeking a profit off the back of education. Yet, if ever hear any pilot announce that it’s their first time in air I’m getting off any way I can. Even if it means leaving my cell phone on or setting my shoes on fire. (On the flight teachers at Madison Park Technical/Vocational High School.)

Ian Jarrett (student), Jesse Scott (U.S Forest Service), Aline Valery (student)

Brian Barnes (student), Laurentino Gomes (student), Ondina Desalva (student), Sean Almodin (BIO Teacher and student), Teresa Lewis (student) Eric Seaborn (Department of Conservation and Recreation)
Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Thanks to an invitation from teacher Katy Burns, I recently had the pleasure of taking learning photos at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HMS) in Brighton. Founded in 1869, it is the oldest public day school in the country serving this population. Its specialized staff educates about 140 students, aged 3-22. The school also has a Parent Infant Program that offers in-home assistance to families during the critical first three years of a child’s life.

A huge open space (used during indoor recess and for large gatherings) welcomes pre-school/kindergarten students and their families. Mini-posters outside every classroom include a photo of the teacher, his/her name, and the room number – something that would make any school more welcoming! Classes are necessarily small and just about everyone communicates in American Sign Language (ASL) as well as orally. I was impressed from how to greet people in sign as I visited classrooms with Lynda Sennott, one of four full-time interpreters on staff.

Student activities are as varied as in any school: “listening” to stories, working on math problems, taking tests, reviewing homework, painting in art class, making posters about historical figures, getting 1:1 assistance or conferencing. I ask about students using their teachers’ first names and learn that doing so is an element of Deaf Culture; each person has a unique sign made (usually) from one’s initial and a personal feature. I was impressed by the fluid, constant use of sign in communicating everything from simple requests to complex ideas. Students were clearly comfortable with both ways of interacting.

I see Smartboards, computers, microphones, and other adaptive technology in use in many classrooms. Vocational training as well as college prep courses are available to high school students. A fully equipped digital lab for the production of documents, books, and posters is in the pride and joy of teacher Tom Lally, who developed a student-run document imaging business called ScanWorks.

The Horace Mann School nurtures social/emotional needs as well as academic achievement, creating a supportive and healthy school climate. In the hallway my eyes are drawn to a large sheet of chart paper entitled, “What do YOU do to calm down and relieve stress?” Collaboratively created after an unexpected loss, this is a living document to which teachers and students continually add their ideas. As I leave the office, I notice a small tree decorated for the holidays with student photos glued onto paper “I love you” hand signs. I loved visiting this school… please invite me to yours!

We were watching our teacher read/tell a story. Gabriela’s favorite is the one about the turtle who wanted to fly like a bird or climb like a squirrel. Some people like games more than stories, but everyone is learning how to sign.

– Grade 2 students in Elsa Herrera’s ASL class: Javen Dias, Ahmad Haas, Gabriela Portofo, Stéphanie Brandao & Maya Payne (with student teacher Melissa Streed).

I was playing with Nicholas (Smoll). I am learning how to sign and how to be a good friend.
– Bijoux Eaddy, K0

I was doing “minute math” with Cliff (Furtado). This year I’m learning how to multiply.
– Chloé Jean-Pierre, Grade 3

I was using our smart board to measure the angle of a triangle. My teacher Charlotte [Corbett] was helping me. I’ve learned all about angles and how to use a protractor.
– Kaysha Hernandez, Grade 5

I was taking a test in English class about when to use “a” or “an”. I’ve learned that you use “an” if the next word starts with a vowel, but you use “a” if it starts with a consonant. We’re also learning how to write with a topic sentence and then add supporting details.
– Leah Harston, Grade 7

In this picture we were learning about decimals. We’ve learned how to convert fractions into decimals. We’ve also learned new math vocabulary, like “benchmarks,” which are common fractions that help us make comparisons. It’s so fun learning all together in this class!
– Grade 6 Math with Rosanna Jones & Steve Weiner

I was doing a lab in Science with Brian (Gibson) and Rebecca (Hart). We were learning about cell membranes and how certain substances add to or remove mass from an egg cell.
– Julissa Felder, Grade 10

We’re Learning Here
A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.
BTU Celebrates the Holidays!

Photos by Michael J. Maguire