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Boston Teachers Union

TEACH: Teachers are Talking. Is the Nation Listening?

A Film Review by Ann B. O’Halloran, Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, 2007

The debate is raging, what direction will this nation take our schools? Should we privatize our public schools? Should we fire all the teachers in our underperforming schools? Through parallel paths, the film reveals the decline of the joy of teaching and the joy of learning. The crushing of the freedom to explore. The inequalities of resources. The growth of the “One Right Answer.” The film makes clear that the input of educators which is critical to improving education has been held in contempt and marginalized.

Lamothe has found the voices of children and schools, normally shunted aside in meetings, by the media, and by those who would privatize public education and open a new marketplace, reiterated to as “The Enchilada.” The voices you hear are those of brave individuals, willing to go public with their concerns. They speak with courage and conviction. This joint effort aims to be a catalyst for positive change in the current volatile atmosphere.

As many educators, parents, community leaders watched, public education has morphed into something unrecognizable. Most educators continue on, trying to survive, trying to speak out for children, while living in a cauldron of hot change that has not improved schools in general. This film should encourage and embolden those who care about children, schools and our democracy. In the film State Representative Carl Sciortino, for one, urges people to speak out loudly on education issues, to explain their concerns at the State House, to become a bigger voice.

The messages seen throughout the film are not strange to most educators. As Jonathan Kozol reminds us in the film, while each student has unique special abilities and interests, these are now neglected. Current policies destroy what makes education great and successful. “The spirit of a punitive, mean spirited, blaming atmosphere in the schools… destroys the spirits of teachers and students”... while essential collaboration and cooperation get lip service.

The reality of Kozol’s words were highlighted just last week when reports emerged that under [previous] Superintendent Hall, in Atlanta “Underlings were humiliated during rallies at the Georgia Dome… [she] permitted principals with the highest test scores to sit up front

(continued on page 6)
The Education Zone

BY PATTY SALISBURY

T his year there will be 17 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 and return it to the BTU no later than April 18, 2012. The recipients of the scholarships will be notified by May 18, 2012.

Retired Teachers Chapter Scholarships

E ach year the Retired Teachers Chapter of the Boston Teachers Union awards scholarships to deserving high school seniors who are children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews of BTU members. One of these scholarships is earmarked for a student who might not choose to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution. Applications for these scholarships may be picked up at the BTU/BTU offices at 180 Mt. Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125 or can be downloaded from the BTU website. The deadline to apply is April 21, 2012.

Dear Editor,

I am the youngest of seven children all educated in the Boston Public Schools. I also attended college in Boston. I was in the fourth grade when court-ordered desegregation began in the Boston Public Schools. My parents, who had both been Boston Public School teachers, wanted to keep me in the public school system, even against the urging of many friends, family members and neighbors. I attended five different schools in five years. There were incidents, police escorting school buses, and lots of change. It was a time of turmoil and confusion for the City and its children. I was fortunate to have wonderful parents to guide me through the dizzying events of those first few years. I certainly learned how to stick up for myself, and became a mature and independent child during those years.

In all my years of schooling, there is only one teacher who stands out. I was in the fifth grade in 1957. My school assignment was to the John James Audubon School in Dorchester. My teacher that year was a cigar-smoking, wise-cracking, father and husband. Robert Jango made it a year that our class learned that someone in all the craziness really cared about us and had great expectations for us.

In my third year at school, Mr. Jango helped us run fund-raisers for a class trip to Washington, D.C. The trip, and this diverse group of children having an opportunity to see the great monuments of our nation together, still stands out in my mind.

More important than all the extra activities that Mr. Jango inititated to keep us engaged, was the time he spent getting to know us and our families. Mr. Jango visited my family, with a box of chocolates, every Christmas for the year after I left the Audubon until the year I got married. At a time when it seemed that the children of this city were only an afterthought to the political and racial posturing of most adults, Mr. Jango showed us respect. He showed us that he cared about us as people and about our families; he expected us to learn and make a difference.

On his annual trip to my parents’ house, Mr. Jango wrote lyrics to a song for his latest school: Jamaica Plain High, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, here we learn, here we grow. The stories were ones of creating an atmosphere of acceptance and respect where it was greatly needed.

He brought bags of oranges to the high school football team during game, took students who had no other means to the prom (providing the vehicle and his photography), bought Christmas presents for the younger sibling of students, and did evening and weekend tutoring.

The Boston Public Schools are different than they were in the ’70s, but then, like now, so many people thought that the time and needs were desperate. Teachers who are willing to give of their time and talents to build the character of their students are as important today as ever.

I left the Boston Public Schools and went on to earn a degree in engineering. I have tried to bring the values Mr. Jango instilled in me to my own children, my grandchildren, and the students I teach. I hope to transmit the same passion for learning as Mr. Jango did.

Thank You, Mr. Jango

Lisa Papetti

Peace, Lisa Papetti

Reflections on the Twilight Zone

T his story was one of the first of the Twilight Zone to be aired, and is also the first of their familiar mind-bending style that combines the familiar with the fantastic to engage viewers. Its author, Rod Serling, was a master of the genre, creating a series of stories that blend the real with the surreal, the ordinary with the extraordinary.

In this story, we see a version of the school system as it might be, if it were to be restructured in a way that is more equitable and fair. The story poses the question: What if there were no more failures? What if every student was successful, and there were no need for remediation or special education?

The story suggests that such a system would be beneficial to all students, not just those who are traditionally identified as “successful.” By eliminating the labels and biases that currently exist in the education system, we could create a more inclusive and just system for all students.

The story also highlights the importance of teachers in the educational process. The teacher in this story, Mr. Jango, is portrayed as a mentor and guide, helping his students to achieve their potential and to see themselves as capable of success.

Overall, the story is a thought-provoking exploration of the potential for a more equitable and fair education system, and the impact that such a system could have on the lives of students.

Thank you, Mr. Jango.
Letter to the Editor

Regarding Degree Inflation

To the Editor

I take issue with a few of the comments made by Michael Maguire in his recent article on Degree Inflation. He claims that "good teaching, like good leadership, is innate." The logic behind this statement is that the disposition of it at the school level by each and every employee of the facts giving rise to the act or condition which is the basis of her or his grievance." It is best to put the Step 1 grievance in writing so that there is a record of what transpired. The investigation was delivered to the administrator in a timely basis and to curtail any mis-understanding of the intent of the ex- pressive BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The principal shall communicate his/her decision orally or in writing to the aggrieved employee and to any Union representative who participated in this Step within five (5) school days after receiving the complaint or within five (5) school days after the conference, whichever is earlier. If the involved Administrator does not get back to the grievant and/or BTU Rep within five (5) school days, it is considered a negative re- sponse to the grievance. The BTU Field Representatives pro- cess Step 1 grievances and if the grievance is unresolved on Step 1, we refer it to the next Step which, according to the contract, is mediation. When the Step 1 grievance is denied or the response of the grievant and/or BTU Rep is not present to assure that the witness. If it is a grievance entailing a resignation from the grievant, the contract states; "The Union Build- ing Representative in each high school shall be allowed one administrative period per week for con- ferring with teachers on grievances or associated matters. The Union building representative in each school shall be allowed 45 minutes per week during administrative time for the pur- pose of conferring with teachers on griev- ances or associated matters." This amount of time is generally sufficient to per- form all of the work entailed in being an effective BTU Rep., however, it is time which has been contractually agreed to and in the BTU Reps. right to insist upon being included in their school site work schedule.

Michael Maguire

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WHEN WRITING:

All correspondence to the Boston Teachers Union must be addressed to the Union at the above address.

All articles must be appropriate to the publication's readership. Letters to the Editor should be sent to letters@btu.org.

DEADLINE:
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the Boston Union Teacher is March 15th. Your copy should be e-mailed to girclick@btu.org and will be printed promptly. This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

MICHAEL J. MAGUIRE

Boston Teacher

Regarding Degree Inflation

A grievance is a statement which says that a procedural or right has been violated due to a misrepresentation or misapplication of the contract. A grievance must be filed every time an individual teacher's rights are violated in order to protect the rights of the entire membership. When our most recent contract negotiations, all of our rights are hard fought and must be maintained daily through their imple- mentation. The contract itself is a docu- ment is only as good as the enforce- ment of it at the school level by each and every BTU member. When aspects of our working conditions are not working, we have a responsibility to set a dangerous precedent not only for the individual, but for the membership at large.

If aspects of the labor/management agree- ment, better known as the BTU contract, are not followed as prescribed, then a grievance can and should be filed. The contract details, “An employee or his or her Union Rep may either orally or in writing present their grievance to the Principal, Headmaster, or Director within a reasonable time, normally thirty (30) school days after knowledge of the violation.” The grievance must be in writing and must be filed with the BTU. The contract states, “The Union Building Representative or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- spective BTU Field Representative can assist you in framing the letter. The contract states, “The Union Building Rep and/or your re- respecti
New York City Teacher Rankings Based on Flawed Data

The decision by the New York City Department of Education to release teacher rankings based on an algorithm that the department’s own admission, are based on unreliable data – amounts to a public flogging of teachers, AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

“Instead of working with teachers to develop and implement an evaluation system that would be fair and reliable, they guinea pigged K-12 teachers about it because it affects their newest colleagues, their own professional development and the quality of their schools. Higher education faculty depend on solid teacher training to turn out future generations of prepared college applicants. And, of course, education faculty are at the center of college and university teacher preparation programs.

“The AFT is in a unique position to lead in teacher education: ‘We’re in a different place than people who just point fingers,’ AFT president Randi Weingarten told the task force last week. ‘Put your finger on the pulse of the classroom to more theory-based college coursework, and work together toward a solution.’

The task force has a good start: the AFT publication, “Building a Profession: Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Induction,” is highly regarded as a visionary outline for ensuring teacher quality from the very beginning. Now, the 14 task force members, carefully chosen for their expertise and positions in education scholarship, are working to develop a real alternative to the current teacher preparation programs. They will update their research and produce a new report to release in July.

Several issues surfaced repeatedly as the most important elements of teacher preparation; clinical experience, from an early point in the education of a teacher; strong command of subject matter; admissions standards and exit requirements for teacher preparation programs; continued training, especially during the first years of classroom experience; and evaluation of teacher education programs.

The AFT recently convened a new task force on teacher preparation. This issue is far too important to be left to those who have never stood in a classroom. In fact, Michael Bloomberg and the city’s education officials preferred to publicly ridicule teachers,” Weingarten says.

While some of the basics have not changed since “Building a Profession” was published in 2004, a variety of guest speakers offered specific insights.

Francesca Forzani shared her experience as associate director of “Teaching at the fulcrum of successful teaching: K-12 teachers care about it because it affects their newest colleagues, their own professional development and the quality of their schools. Higher education faculty depend on solid teacher training to turn out future generations of prepared college applicants. And, of course, education faculty are at the center of college and university teacher preparation programs.”

The AFT recently convened a new task force on teacher preparation. This issue is far too important to be left to those who have never stood in a classroom. In fact, Michael Bloomberg and the city’s education officials preferred to publicly ridicule teachers,” Weingarten says.

Virginia Myers, January 31, 2012

Republican Education Legislation is a Step Backward

Two Republican-sponsored bills to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have been introduced during the 112th Congress: the House Education and the Workforce Committee Feb. 28 along party lines, would undermine efforts to improve our public schools, AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

“The federal government has long played a central role in ensuring that all children have access to a good education,” Weingarten says. “It is uncons- ciousable that some in Congress want to walk away from our nation’s commitment to providing an education that allows every child to compete on a level playing field.

Instead of addressing the flaws of No Child Left Behind, these proposals take several steps backward – not the step forward that students and teachers need.

“The Student Success Act, is an effort to deny teachers their voice and is responsible for improving student achievement, while the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act does just the opposite by holding only teachers accountable for their students’ performance. The AFT strongly supports teacher evaluation systems that are fair and reliable, support the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. The proposed system is designed to simply sort teachers rather than to help them improve their craft. This is a wasted opportunity to support and expand the good work on teacher evaluation already taking place around the country.

“Together, these bills cut funding to districts with the most challenges, reverse the positive trend of adopting rigorous academic standards and a rich curriculum, fail to address the pervasive fixation on testing, prioritize the quantity rather than the quality of education, and provide an education that allows every child to compete on a level playing field.”

[United Federation of Teachers, AFT press release, February 27, 2012]

AFT Task Force Takes New Look at Teacher Preparation

The AFT recently convened a new task force on teacher preparation. This issue is far too important to be left to those who have never stood in a classroom. In fact, Michael Bloomberg and the city’s education officials preferred to publicly ridicule teachers,” Weingarten says.

Virginia Myers, January 31, 2012

AFT Members Respond to Fox News Challenge

A guest on Fox News recently issued a challenge to the AFT and president Randi Weingarten: Show just one example of where the union has put the interests of students first. While the challenge is clearly ridiculous, and the comments on the show from Kyle Olson, head of the Education Action Group, were full of distortions, AFT members nonetheless posted all kinds of amazing examples when the AFT asked for responses on our Facebook page.

Olson and others who criticize teachers unions always fail to understand that the teachers are the union, and they make a huge difference for children every day; that’s on top of the countless, well-documented efforts by the AFT and our affiliates around the country to improve the public education system.

Here are just a few of the responses teachers posted on Facebook:

“I had an administrator bully a child in my classroom, and I stood up for that student. I stuck my neck out in order to maintain my professional integrity, and (more importantly) to protect my student from an arbitrary exercise of power. I was a second-year teacher and not yet eligible for tenure. That administrator was in charge of my evaluation as well. Needless to say my evaluation was far from perfect, but I wear that as a badge of honor. So you could let Kyle Olson know that teachers do not get into this business for ourselves, but for our communities and for our next generations.”

“I can’t believe that people think that teachers don’t put students first. When do we not put students first? Here I am grading papers on my own time as I have every night and weekend this year. I do all my lesson plans and (I do it out of love) to prepare to get the most out of my students. I do science club on my own time. I make every student a birthday card and card their on birthday on my own time. I make sure they have notebooks, pens, pencils and paper out of my own pocket. I buy their lunches when they have no money, and I listen to them on my time and try to help them with all the things they have going on in their own lives. I am totally insulted by Kyle Olson’s remarks.”

“How about taking dirty clothes home to be washed (and getting reprimanded for doing so), buying kids new sneakers, staying late late doing lesson plans because I spent my planning time with children, writing IEPs at all day Saturday, … etc., etc., etc.”

“There are millions of examples of teachers going above and beyond for their students every day, but we on Guam have tons more then we as a union (Guam Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1581) have done to improve the quality of education for our students. We have kept class sizes reasonable for 40 years because we know what a huge thing that has on learning outcomes. We have invested millions of dollars of dues money (as has the AFT) in high-quality professional education to help teachers be more successful in the classroom. We have protected teachers’ rights to stand up to crazy, unproductive reform programs, and we have constantly fought, through our contracts, to make sure that teachers have the tools they need to teach their students. I am incredibly prepared to go on Fox to debate them on the subject.”

“I would be more than happy to go on Fox to debate them on the subject.”

[Read more responses, and add your own, on the AFT Facebook page. The AFT is tweeting to them to Kyle Olson (@Kyle Olson).]

Here are just a few of the responses teachers posted on Facebook:

Olson and others who criticize teachers unions always fail to understand that the teachers are the union, and they make a huge difference for children every day; that’s on top of the countless, well-documented efforts by the AFT and our affiliates around the country to improve the public education system.

Virginia Myers, January 31, 2012

[Dan Gursky, February 23, 2012]

[United Federation of Teachers, AFT press release, February 27, 2012]
Liking the innumerable moonstreaks torminant millions of years before recorded history, my nine month old son, holding the oversized ball in his palm, with his real and virtual world of antigone, smiles and look at it with an unexpected mixed of fascination and hurry. Intriguingly observing him, I have consciousness of a scene I could not have imagined by my curiosity and thirst for knowledge. His surrounding world is nothing but an excuse to explore. Look, listening, touching, and wondering how and why, are the things that he does. He is completely honest and has developed no capability to hide his emotions. This is a door that has been tightly shut for ages with memory of times and stories he must have heard with magnetic interaction at all the circles and spheres around them, the way I can see them all synthesized in my son’s posture, and how this ing blood barely lit by the opaque sunlight of his predicted eclipse, while the Mayan priest and telling Guatemalan jungle of imaginary colonial Augusto Monterroso’s short story when, Arrazola thoroughly studied at his Span- history with a clear premise; to under- stamper the first chapters of recorded menting these patterns, and in doing so and Egyptians took on the task of docu­ appearances and its intrusion in the path awake for centuries. Ancient Babylonians (continued from page 3)...we have to state that the heavens are spherical and move spherically...

— Prolemy —“The Almagest”

ability to ponder about the intricacies of round things has given us an evolution­ edge worth passing on to the next generation.

An ancient and unable to precisely identify its origins, this awareness for circular shapes and their central role in our lives might have initially got imprinted in our souls in the darkest and earliest of all nights when, concerned by its captivating brightness at creation, Mesopotamian Meso-american gods took to depicting a rabbit on the surface of the big circle of the evening sky, prudently dimming the Moon’s glow, generating an unchanging engraved features, and re­ storing balance with the Sun in an inter­ changeable celestial dance that cemented the idea that everything and all determinants of existence on our own circle, the Earth. But the Moon’s spell over men remained strong, and for the longest time, this magnificent disk continued stirring our souls between the desire of romancing the idealized partner and the scientific awe of its regular patterns. Lovers eventually fall asleep, but recording the Moon seemingly capricious appearances and its intrusion in the path of stars and planets has intrigued humans awake for centuries. Ancient Babylonians and Egyptians took on the task of docu­ menting these patterns, and in doing so stamped the first chapters of recorded history with a clear premise; to under­ stand oneself is necessary to understand the one staring back at us.

It was this legwork and enthrallment, revisited by the Greeks and preserved by the Arabs that Brother Bartolomé Arrazola, normally reticent at the Spanish `Medieval monastery, and uses in Augusto Monterroso’s short story when, at a pyramidal sacrificial altar in the dense Guatemalan jungle, among the strangest times, desperately tries to save his life by impressing the Mayan priest and telling him of the imminent eclipse to occur, but to no avail. Arrazola’s cascad-
**TEACH to be Screened at the Boston International Film Festival**

**By Robert Lamothe**

TEACH, Teachers Are Talking, Is the Nation Listening? is a film that features conversations about the art of teaching and learning by teachers themselves. TEACH brings an important perspective to the national education debate that is often confused and troubling.

This movie takes on many questions about No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, unequal distribution of education resources, and schools dominated by data driven curriculum instead of providing an education that is dynamic, creative, exciting, and joyful. Every day in the media we hear from the businesses, think-tankers, politicians, and administrators, these movies are meant to help us understand how education has millions of dollars to promote their misinformation about education.

TEACH, Teachers Are Talking, Is the Nation Listening? has been accepted into the Boston International Film Festival, which takes place at the AMC Loews movie theatre in downtown Boston. The festival shows 90 films from over 30 countries. It takes place from April 13 - 22.

A BIFF news release describes the festival: “The Boston International Film Festival is a celebration of the art of film making. It encourages and supports independent filmmakers from around the world, bringing to Boston a dazzling array of short and feature length films from a select group of directors. The festival strives to promote understanding of diverse cultures by displaying the passions and unique vision of these filmmakers, and promises to both entertain and educate the viewers.”

The filmmakers of TEACH are teachers in the Boston Public Schools.

Past participants include Linda Hamilton, Patrick Swayze, Donnie Wahlberg, Jack Black, Tony Shaloub and others. Sponsors of the festival include A&E Television, Bravo, BET, Channel 7 News, Mass Art, New York Film Academy, Boston Area Spanish Exchange, Eurochannel, Microsoft, SAG - Screen Actors Guild, JVC, and others.

We will send additional details when we get them. We have created a TEACH One Minute Trailer for the upcoming news campaign for by the Boston International Film Festival. For more information about TEACH, please visit our website: http://www.teachdocumentary.com

**Join us for a special screening at the Boston International Film Festival**

TEACH, Teachers Are Talking, Is the Nation Listening?

**A Documentary**

Made by and About Teachers

April 16, 2012 - 12:30 pm - Patriots Day

AMC Loews Theatres

175 Tremont St.
Boston Common

**TEACH THE TEACHERS**

Are you a teacher or administrator who is passionate about the power of education? Do you believe that every student deserves a quality education and that every teacher plays a unique role as a designated school leader?

**Funding**

TEACH will be screening to raise funds to hire a social worker and paraprofessionals to assist me and the other co-lead teacher Berta. It gives us a little bit of breathing room. But we’ve also got an influx of kids in the upper school and some of them have some challenging behaviors. Some have transferred in from Middle School and already have a history of issues. We want to work with and support these kids but it takes an enormous amount of time on a daily basis.

**So you teach as well, right?**

I do teach. I’m an English teacher and a reading specialist and we are working on our Response to Intervention model for literacy and math. So I do small group reading for 6th, 7th and 8th grades. I teach each grade only a week for a fifty minute block.

**The other parts of my day, I’m doing everything from student support and discipline to data meetings to curriculum meetings. I also work on fundraising, Court Street budgets, ordering materials, getting our library developed, Governing Board, strategic planning, [organizing] family council, [overseeing] facilities management, [and fostering] parent relationships... just for a start.**

**How would you describe yourself now and what do you do? Do you call yourself**

(continued on page 10).

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**Conversation With A Teacher: Betsy Drinan, Co-Lead Teacher at the Boston Teachers Union School**

Betsy Drinan, Co-Lead Teacher of the Boston Teachers Union School

**Funds**

The BTU school opened in September 2009 as a pilot school with seven classrooms and by the next academic year, will be operating as a full K-8 school with one classroom for each grade K-8 and two classes for grades 6-8.

**Teacher conversations**

Needless to say, all the staff and school partners, including co-lead teachers Betsy Drinan and Berta Berriz, have been hard at work. As a teacher-run school, one with two seasoned teachers at the lead and the multiple autonomous of being a pilot school to manage – including the domains of hiring, budget, curriculum, scheduling and governance – there is a lot of work to be done.

Betsy’s office on this particular late Friday afternoon in October reflected this state of being. Within the first few minutes of her arrival at the main office, she was finishing up a tense conversation with another teacher, fielded a phone call about a bus issue, buzzed in an afterschool partner, and managed to get a breath at the same time.

**One of the key themes**

One of the key themes of The Teaching Pulse is an attempt to make conversations around best teaching practices a central focus of our professional organization. And one way I’m hoping to do that is by talking to some of the best teachers in the district and sharing those conversations with other teachers across the city.

I hope that these questions help guide us into a great conversation.

**Is there a typical day in the life of Betsy Drinan, teacher leader at the BTU school?**

Well, it’s not stop-work. I would say that. It’s a non-stop job. Last year, we were short-staffed [but] the student weighted formula worked in our favor and we got extra near her, while sticking those with the lowest scores off to the side, in the bleachers.

Sad-to-say, such behaviors are seen in schools in our commonwealth, too, where the drive to “succeed” with test scores is pushed by bullying behaviors of many school leaders. Curiously, we have a legislative push for teaching kids not to bully while in those same schools educators face administrative bullying.

For everyone involved in education: teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, legislators and other government officials TEACH is a “must-see.” It shows why things are not what they always appear to be and who wants to keep it that way. It clarifies and answers a lot of the confusing and mixed messages presented by the media.

The flood of initiatives, laws, regulations, mediatalk regarding “privatizing,” “data walls,” school closings, school re-openings, “compacts” in cities including Boston where the district and charter school alliances, data-driven policies, are confusing and troubling.

TEACH is the film created by teachers which may frighten you, may resonate with you but will open your eyes and clarify the issues — and will certainly empower you.

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Please send us your quotes/reactions to Teach Documentray

We are in the process of putting together a What People are Saying Quotes Page for the website and other promotional materials that features your quote that gives a reaction or makes a statement about TEACH. We are making progress to reach a national audience for our documentary TEACH, Teachers Are Talking, Is the Nation Listening and would very much appreciate your help.

Please send your quote to us at info@teachdocumentary.com

Also, please include your identifying occupation, title, organization, etc. We thank you for your support of the film and your help in getting the film out to a wider audience.

~ Bob Lamothe

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A Film Review: TEACH: Teachers are Talking, Is the Nation Listening?...

(continued from page 1)
It’s been awhile since I visited the Hennigan Elementary School, this time at the suggestion of New Teacher Developer Amy Kwan-Chan, who is mentoring a first-year teacher there. The Hennigan is a sprawling building in Jamaica Plain with almost 500 students. Its population is 60% Hispanic, and 50% of the students are enrolled in bilingual (SEI) or special education classes. All take swimming classes in the school’s Olympic-size pool, which is open to the community in the evenings.

New principal Maria Cordon (formerly at the Agassiz) was out and about in the building when I arrived. As I visited classes with camera in hand, most students in the upper grades were taking ANet language and math assessments. ANet is being piloted in selected BPS schools and adds 5 more tests per year, with feedback designed to guide re-teaching in areas of student need. With good reason, many teachers in these “data-driven” times feel like they spend more time testing than teaching!

Art teacher Marlon Forrester was conducting a circle discussion with his fifth graders. I was impressed by his calm, sure manner with students as well as his sincere interest in hearing and addressing their concerns. Kristie McElhaney’s students were writing what they could see and infer about the ancient African kingdom of Benin from its artwork. I especially enjoyed visiting primary classes where students were engaged in a variety of learning centers – student choice seems to have been a casualty of our testing mania in upper elementary grades, but is alive and well in the Hennigan’s K-2 classes.

It’s encouraging to see evidence of the school’s focus on students’ social and emotional needs. Photos and inspirational quotes of famous people line the hallway outside the newly renovated library, and murals decorate many of the giant cinderblock walls. This year Mr. Forrester and his students created a dramatic red, black and white representation of the Hennigan’s “5 Bs” slogan: “Be here, Be ready, Be safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible.”

We're Learning Here

Hennigan Elementary School

A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.

We were doing a puzzle to match baby animals and their parents. We are studying animals in science and we’ve learned that baby bears are called cubs and baby cows are called calves.

– Razan Mohamed & Prescilla Alves, Grade 2

We were figuring out “mystery numbers” from clues our teacher gave us. We’ve learned how to solve algebraic equations using the distributive property, which is helpful for solving all kinds of math problems.

– Gabriela Aracena, Kenya Maxwell, & Kiara Depina, Grade 4

We were playing a game with number cards. We are learning to count.

– Annette Delgado & Abdullah Mohamed, K2

We were writing about the gingerbread house we made with Mr. Santizo. We’re learning to read and write and draw. When we get stuck on a word, we can sound it out!

– Jean Marcos Montilla, Yobdriel Diaz, Cristylandi Delgado, Ana Badre, Angel Fernandez & Elvin Rodriguez, Grade 1

We were writing an interesting sentence using a noun and a verb. We’re learning how to write stories with creative language.

– Denise Mejia & Alkira Pujols, Grade 2

We were playing a game with number cards. We are learning to count.

– Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. Her “We’re Learning Here” Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.)

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The Independent Auditor’s Report and Accompanying Notes are an Integral Part of these Financial Statements.
Notes to Financial Statements  
August 31, 2011 and 2010

1. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Organization and Nature of Activities

Boston Teachers Union (the Union) is a labor union organized, funded and managed by current and retired school teachers and paraprofessionals working in the Boston area. Support is primarily derived from union member dues.

Method of Accounting

The financial statements of Boston Teachers Union have been prepared on the accrual method of accounting.

Financial Statement Presentation

The Union has presented its financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles for not-for-profit organizations. Under this guidance, the Union is required to report information regarding financial position and activities according to three classes of net assets: unrestricted net assets, temporarily restricted net assets, and permanently restricted net assets. In addition, the Union is required to present a statement of cash flows.

Contributions

Under generally accepted accounting principles for not-for-profit organizations, contributions received are recorded as unrestricted, temporarily restricted, or permanently restricted based on the existence and nature of any donor restrictions. For the years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010, Boston Teachers Union did not receive any contributions with donor-imposed restrictions that would result in temporarily or permanently restricted net assets.

Property and Equipment

Property and equipment are recorded at cost. Depreciation is provided on the straight-line method over the estimated useful lives of the assets.

Income Tax

The Union is a not-for-profit organization that is exempt from both federal and state income taxes under Section 501(c)(5) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Use of Estimates

The preparation of financial statements in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amount of assets and liabilities and disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues and expenses during the reporting period. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Reclassifications

Certain amounts in the August 31, 2010 financial statements have been reclassified for comparative purposes to conform with the presentation in the current year financial statements.

2. Investments

The Union held $2,730,411 and $2,577,806 at August 31, 2011 and 2010, respectively. Mutual funds invested in bonds that are obligations of the U.S. government, its agencies and instrumentalities, and are backed by the full faith and credit of the United States and have short to long term maturities through Putnam Investments. The fair market value of the investments at August 31, 2011 and 2010 was $2,730,411 and $2,577,806, respectively. The following schedule summarizes the investment return and their classification in the statement of activities for the years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dividend Income</td>
<td>$141,759</td>
<td>$130,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized Short-Term Gains</td>
<td>88,599</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized Long-Term Gains</td>
<td>39,895</td>
<td>8,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Unrealized Gain</td>
<td>(117,048)</td>
<td>$126,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL INVESTMENT RETURN</strong></td>
<td><strong>$152,605</strong></td>
<td><strong>$256,891</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Fair Value Measurement

The fair value measurements and levels within the fair value hierarchy of those measurements for the assets reported at fair value on a recurring basis at August 31, 2011 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Fair Value (Level 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putnam U.S. Gov’t Income Trust – A</td>
<td>$2,730,411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fair value measurements and levels within the fair value hierarchy of those measurements for the assets reported at fair value on a recurring basis at August 31, 2010 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Fair Value (Level 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putnam U.S. Gov’t Income Trust – A</td>
<td>$2,577,806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Risks and Uncertainties

The Union invests in various investment securities. Investment securities are exposed to various risks such as interest rate, market, and credit risks. Due to the level of risk associated with certain investment securities, it is at least reasonably possible that changes in the values of investment securities will occur in the near term and such changes could materially affect the amounts reported in the statement of financial position.

5. Transactions with Related Entities

The Union rents office and conference room space from a related entity, B.T.U.H.W.F. Building Corp. on a tenant-at-will basis under the terms of a lease which ended September 1, 2005. The yearly base rent is adjusted annually on September 1st to correspond to the change in the “Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers for Boston, MA. All Items” during the twelve-month period which ended in the previous July. B.T.U.H.W.F. Building Corporation was responsible for all utilities, including water and sewer, and repairs to the rented space. Payments to B.T.U.H.W.F. Building Corporation totaled $101,189 and $99,856, respectively, for the years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010. In addition, the Boston Teachers Union pays $15 per day for conference room set-up fees to the B.T.U.H.W.F. Building Corp. under the agreement which ended June 30, 2007. As of December 21, 2011, the agreement has not been modified and continues under the initial terms. Fees paid under this agreement for the fiscal year ended August 31, 2011 and 2010 totaled $315 and $670, respectively.

6. Retired Teachers’ Benefits

Effective July 31, 1987, dues paid to the Union by retired teachers and retired paraprofessionals for two consecutive years qualify them to participate in eye care benefits. Eyeglasses will be provided not more frequently than once in any 24-month period. Full details of benefits and limitations are described in “Guidelines for Retirees Eyeglass Benefit.”

7. Retirement Plan Contribution

The employees of the Union participate in a defined contribution retirement plan. The Union’s contributions are equal to 10% of the annual salary of participating employees plus administration fees. The Union’s contributions to the plan totaled $123,740 and $121,888 respectively, for the years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010.

8. Concentration of Credit Risk

The Union has a concentration of credit represented by cash balances in a certain financial institution in amounts which occasionally exceed federal and state deposit insurance limits. The Union’s management continually reviews the financial stability of this institution.

9. Advertising

Advertising costs are charged to operations when incurred. Advertising expense was $34,762 and $96,587 for the years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010, respectively.

10. Per Capita – Working Massachusetts

On September 20, 2009, the Executive Board voted to join Working Massachusetts, a Massachusetts labor organization which performs public relations, research and communications work on behalf of public sector employees, and to allocate up to $10,000 to join Working Massachusetts. Quarterly per capita for membership is billed and paid quarterly. For the fiscal years ended August 31, 2011 and 2010, the Union paid $5,000 and $13,333, respectively, in per capita to Working Massachusetts.

11. AFT Innovation Grant / Grant – Boston Educational Development Foundation, Inc.

Boston Teachers Union received an AFT Innovation Fund grant in September 2010 in the amount of $50,000 to “increase students’ engagement in lessons by creating prototypes of high-quality instructional units that can be distributed online.” In September 2010, the BTU turned the grant over to the Boston Educational Development Foundation, Inc., a tax-exempt organization that “acts as a fiscal agent for programs within the Boston Public Schools that improve the quality of learning, teaching and administration within the Boston Public Schools.”

12. Evaluation of Subsequent Events

The Union has evaluated subsequent events through January 10, 2012, the date which the financial statements were available to be issued.
Conversation With a Teacher: Betsy Drinan, Co-Lead Teacher at the Boston Teachers Union School…

(continued from page 6)

yourself a teacher? A teacher-leader? A building leader?

I call myself a co-lead teacher. The title is a bit cumbersome, but that's what it is. I feel like I mostly coordinate. I work with teachers, our professional learning team, and parents all the time. It's my responsibility that ideas and projects get picked up and that we follow up on them and move them forward, because they can get lost. We are all keepers of the vision here but I feel that it is my particular job, along with everyone else, to keep us moving towards the goals we set for ourselves in our strategic plan.

Do you feel like there's a proportion in your mind that describes the balance between being a classroom teacher and an administrator?

Well, I teach reading and I've been teaching reading for a long time so I have a wealth of materials to draw on. Most of my preparation I do on the weekends at home. I like the teaching. It keeps me connected with students who have made tremendous emotional and social growth. Kids who were struggling and scoring at the 30th percentile. It's very exciting to see that percentile and now they're at the 60th percentile. And to see kids engaged in the past. We have some situations that would have confounded them and to see that kind of growth, and to see kids engaged...

There was a moment of leadership development I think one of the most important practices is being open to and encouraging teachers to take on projects that they feel particularly skilled at or committed to. I think it's about opening up that leadership circle and then leaders emerge naturally. That has not been my usual experience in other schools I have worked in. We've followed the school principal and department heads here. We've been buzzeting about developing a school principal for the next few years. We've been to department meetings and personal meetings to talk. It's been about opening up the leadership circle and then leaders emerge naturally. That has not been my usual experience in other schools I have worked in.

What do you feel like the office is open to other teachers coming in is because you are a teacher as well? I think that's really the truth because I'm not the boss here. I can make decisions and just go with what I want. I have to go back to them. It's the way we're established. I am the co-lead teacher. I am not in charge of school decision making. I am the co-lead teacher. I work with teachers who have meetings every week and there were supervision meetings to a school where there were no regular staff meetings at all. Scary. If you want to run a school as a school without regular faculty meetings?

Is it fair to say that your office is to other teachers coming in is because you are a teacher as well? I think that's really the truth because I'm not the boss here. I can make decisions and just go with what I want. I have to go back to them. It's the way we're established. I am the co-lead teacher. I am not in charge of school decision making. I am the co-lead teacher. I work with teachers who have meetings every week and there were supervision meetings to a school where there were no regular staff meetings at all. Scary. If you want to run a school as a school without regular faculty meetings?

It sounds like there's a different kind of accountability here. You're accountable to the other teacher staff as the co-lead teacher but they're accountable to you, too... and you have certain responsibilities they understand as well. Right, we're all responsible to the students. The stakes are high here. We were talking about the stress and the demands of this job [the other day], particularly on teachers with young kids at home and this teacher suggested that maybe he should have stayed at his former school because, he said, "I think that the expectations were less there." It's different at this school, though. The expectations are high.

Who makes them high?

We all do. We all do. We feel responsible to our students and families and to our school to do our best. I do. We need to be a good school... you know plenty of people told me that "OK, Betsy! It better be good!" (laughing) and it actually is a bridge. You mentioned before how the BTU school is successful. What are your thoughts on the Boston Teachers Union as a professional organization? What does it do well, what does it do need to do better, how can we include more voices to make it a stronger union?

I wish that our union could be more of a collaborative partner with the district. The district is not a believer in collaboration. Some strategically every once in a while, it's necessary to have this stance, but it's not productive for the community. Demonizing people... [is counterproductive] and there's an awful lot of that going on in our society... demonizing teachers, our union... and (even) individual schools.

I'd like to see our profession and our union do more in terms of proposing solutions to the problems that we're facing that are much under attack these days that sometimes we all do to just try to lend energy and hope. I think that our union is strong and we do have some degree of power and protection. But on the other hand, there are important issues where maybe we could be more proactive.

One that's front and center for me is the situation of differing policies and missions between certain charter school and BPS schools. I had a conversation with an [administrator] from a local charter school and they stated that any kid that gets into a fight is automatically expelled given their zero tolerance policy. He then modified this by saying that the woman who made this policy was not there when this opportunity to withdraw so their record wasn't impacted but that the kid would definitely be gone. I asked him where the kid went next but he ignored my question.

The question is whether there is a balancing act between differing missions... the BPS is here to serve all the kids – not contribute to the increasing educational stratification going on in our country. You're right, with all due respect, your system isn't as responsive as it needs to be...

But you don't have the background or resources...

Even if I do have the background because I have some, I don't have the personnel to work with [students with particular risk factors]. I am not in favor of expelling [students] from the system. I am in favor of us developing and providing different voices to help turn things around for them.

But you're right, we need the resources and the extra personnel to do this. Parents could help the district figure this out. It is critical for these young people.

It sounds like we in the larger education community need professional teachers, teacher unions, and the teaching staff to recognize who students need.

Exactly, exactly. I'd like to see our union become a center of education for teachers. When I was at a recent AFT conference, I talked to people at the Education Research and Dissemination Program and the courses they offer [on research-based professional development]. Let's get our union to be a center of that kind of thinking. And I think that the union could be the go-to place for good, quality professional development.

How would you think that would change the dynamic between the school district and the teachers union, or the union, and can it often be tense or harsh in tone?

First of all, if the BTU were a center for professional development you might get a better quality of people going to the union hall because people would be coming there to get their quality PD. It would strengthen our union and our approach to trying to increase collaboration with the district.

In terms of changing the dynamic between the district and the union though,
that's a tough one. A lot of the issues that are so divisive nationally are front and center in Brookline. For example, merit pay is really more of an insult than anything else—a simple, corrosive idea that is not even a problem, but a com- plicated problem. Just pay the teachers a bonus and they will work harder and things will be better? Do they even have a chance of being happy with that? I don’t know why not everyone that school has a social worker, reading and math specialist and updated library and technology resources. Give us the personnel to work with our most troubled kids.

I think it would be worthwhile for the district to look at a more concrete way to explain why they are pushing some of the changes they are. On the other hand, we as the teachers union need to be willing to look at new ways to do things also.

Good and open communication is key. The adversarial positions we are often forced into really are not conducive to good problem-solving.

In your role as a co-lead teacher, how much has your practice changed at all about what it means to be a good teacher? Or what it means to be a good building administrator?

I think I have really been thinking a lot about the sense that I'm a lot more cognizant of the overall organigram. I consider a school as a complex living organism. And I’ve always been somebody that has [considered] systems. I like to look at the whole, how it all works. But when you’re a classroom teacher and you think, especially in schools where you have limited information—never mind input—you just see your classroom.

Now you see the whole school. And it’s a house of cards sometimes—it can be a delicate balancing act. It doesn’t take much to trip the whole organization.

Can you offer one or two suggestions that would help schools build a collaborative environment that would benefit everybody?

You have to break down that artificial barrier. The idea of administrators against the teachers is ridiculous if you hope to be a good school. And school leaders are in a ridiculous situation that’s artificially created... and some people work to maintain it. For no other reason. It’s always easier to have the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys’ and most of the time it’s not that simple. Though sometimes it is that simple... [laughs]

But in schools, it’s usually not. Especially as we have increasing demands that our schools are the center for socialization, education, poverty reduction, so they are supposed to do everything. We’re supposed to do everything.

People have to take the time to get to know each other and develop some level of trust. There has to be an openness and willingness to discuss the issues as well as make proposals. We’re not gonna get authentic if it’s hard to work together successfully.

You’re asking interesting questions that I haven’t really spent the time thinking about. And it makes me think now that I do have a perspective here. But I think it’s a different school to look at it in a way to say, “What are you modeling forward that we can create that sustain this work in a more viable way?”

Right, something that can be transferred and replicated.

Right. So much of it is about stuff- ing as many people as four, more people, I could take the woman who was just here and have her teach one less class. And give her the re- sponsibilities for developing and implementing our writing curriculum, and much lower the stress of her regular position instead of an extra responsibility she is willing to have. I don’t think she is committed. But how much can you reasonably ask people to do?

The reality is, they can talk all they want about restructuring pathways and things, but you have to have more people to do that. The reality is, we are spread so thin. We do not have enough people to do everything we want to do.

The Boston Public Schools and urban public schools are interested in understanding. Give us a few more people. One of our teachers taught in Brookline before she came into Boston and it is fascinating to hear her talk about the extra people who were available to her on a regular basis in Brookline.

And I hope in some way, we figure out a way to look at the systems you have in place and the needs that you have; we don’t often communicate and learn from each other.

There’s so little of that. It’s stunning. You were asking me about sharing with other administrators so here’s what has happened. In the district meetings and the parts that are often the most worthwhile are the conversations that you have during the breaks. Like, the “how did you do it that way?” and “what do you have in place for student support and how do you structure that?” and “what are you doing with your writing curriculum?” Because there is no place for that. And there isn’t a place for it for teachers, by and large—we’re trying to do it, but we’re not at it big. We only have one or two or grade ELA teacher, and one 7th and 8th grade math teacher.

But do you have a natural place for that... calling all 3rd grade teachers, you know? Let’s talk about how you teach 3rd grade. What are you doing? Because people are hungry for that. And you get great ideas. Sure, I can go online and read a million things, but it’s not the same. Let me show you, you know? It’s not the same big. We only have one or two grade 3rd grade ELA teacher, and one 7th and 8th grade math teacher. What systems do we all have in place to motivate students? I want to talk to the charter school and ask them where they’re doing because they’ve got some good ideas. But who’s pulling us together? Nobody really, in the sense of providing time to simply share ideas and brainstorm together.

Outside of individuals or happen- 

Who? You talk to your friends and people you know, but in a complex profes- sion that we have, to stand in a classroom of twenty-six kids and keep them all mo- tivated and engaged, learning specific skills and big ideas, [and differentiating]? It’s like magic when you do it. It’s highly complicated. And awesome.

And awesome when it works and it’s done well. Are there any words you’d like to end with?

I wish I had more time to pursue these conversations of moving our profession and our union forward. I don’t right now think that’s the case. There’s not a lot of that.

I feel very fortunate to have given this opportunity.

And I might extend this idea to say that all of us have this opportunity. What do you think? Please consider visiting the online forum of our partners. Open an email, type out your reactions, thoughts and ideas. (James Lion is a Peer Assistant in the Boston Public Schools.)
The second annual “Organize Our Future” conference, hosted by the Greater Boston Labor Council Futures Committee, was held on February 26, 2012 at the Boston Teachers Union Hall. 80 union members, community activists and students were in attendance. All are 35 years old or younger.

The purpose of this conference was to empower, educate and connect young union members around this city to be more knowledgeable and active in their local unions, in their communities and our central labor council.

Liz Shuler, Secretary-Treasurer of the National AFL-CIO, came to address this conference. She is a huge supporter of the young worker movement across the nation. She realizes the importance of training our younger members to be future leaders in order to strengthen and maintain the Labor Movement. AFL-CIO MA President Steven Tolman, Greater Boston Labor Council (GBLC) President Lou Mandarini, and GBLC Secretary-Treasurer Rich Rodgers also addressed the young workers.

The GBLC Futures Committee had four workshops for the young workers to attend: Politics: More Than Just a Party, Flash Mob: Mad at the Marriott, Labor’s Vision and Values: Learning from the Past to Build a Better Future, and What’s Your Story? Use it to Organize.

If you are 35 or under and want to be a part of the Futures Committee, please contact Allison Doherty at adoherty@btu.org.

(Allison Doherty teaches special education at Urban Science Academy.)