

# BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

January 2005

## THE ATTACK ON OUR ELBO

The Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC) is the oversight board for all public employee retirement systems. They make "the rules." Now, they have proposed new rules that would make "enhanced compensation" ineligible to be called "regular compensation" for retirement purposes. This would cause our Elective Longevity Buy-Out (ELBO) payments not count toward retirement calculations.

Anyone who has been in the system for 20 years may elect to give up their normal longevity bonus, severance pay and sick leave buy-back and get three years of ELBO payments. The amount given up about equals the amount gained for those three years, but all of the ELBO payments count toward retirement (at least they do now). Some people take the ELBO as soon as they can, getting an advance on their longevity payments; some people take the ELBO in their last three years to maximize the retirement benefit.

PERAC regulations have the force of law, but must be approved first by the PERAC Commissioners (some of whom are public employees). They held hearings about this change. During these hearings we learned that the primary impetus for their changing regulations is the police and firefighter provisions that enhance salaries prior to retirement. They said several times that plans like our ELBO were not what caused this rule change. We seem to be "collateral damage", or an unintended consequence. And, if you thought we were suffering for the sins of Billy Bulger, bear in mind that the infamous "housing allowance" that Bulger wanted counted would still be counted under the new regulations, as it should as long as 11% of that value is deducted from his pay and he pays taxes on it.

The problem is that the Romney administration believes we are committing fraud and "raiding" the retirement systems. They

*continued on page 2*

## NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

Contract negotiations between the school committee and the BEU will begin on January 23, when the two sides trade proposals for Unit A. Negotiations will continue on January 26 when we trade proposals for Unit B and the Para Unit. No other bargaining sessions have been scheduled at this time.

The BEU team has already conferred about most issues and is working to finalize its proposals. As per our members' priorities, the team is focusing on compensation, benefits and a few working conditions issues. We expect that the School Committee may have different priorities. We hope to have a good and fair agreement by the end of school, optimistically in May. The team will be report to the membership at the end of each session (if there is anything to report).

During this time of preparation, the team has been compiling research on the contracts of our comparison communities. We are also doing some research on cost of living and tax rates. We are looking forward to sharing this information with the membership.

Our thanks to the bargaining team for the time it has put in and the time it will require to accomplish their important work.

## NEWS FROM THE BEU REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

At its meeting on December 12, 2005, the Representative Council voted in the affirmative on two policy issues:

The first vote was in regard to vouchers, earned by teachers for supervising interns and student teachers, that allow us to take classes at local colleges and universities. The Council voted to request of the administration three modifications:

1. clarify that a teacher who had earned a voucher is higher in the hierarchy than other teachers
2. group all employees together in the hierarchy (this was mainly to elevate the paras on a par with the rest of us)
3. ensure the policy is distributed annually.

The second policy vote was to request of the School Committee to enact a policy on military recruiting, consistent with NCLB, that would primarily:

1. ensure that students (and parents) can more easily opt-out of military recruiting, and if legal, have an opt-in policy instead
2. not allow institutions that discriminate to recruit (this would effectively bar the military until such time as they openly allow gays and lesbians to serve).

Hold the Date:

The BEU will be screening the movie **"Walmart: The High Cost of Low Wages"** on Thursday Feb 2 at 3:00 in the MLK room.

The screening will be followed by a discussion.



The Contract Corner:

## DEADLINES

1. All requests for long term leaves of absence, extensions of leaves or renewals must be submitted by February 1st in writing to Steve Barrasso and to your immediate supervisor.

2. Requests for **signing up for the Elective Longevity Buyout (ELBO)** must be made by February 1 to start the next September.

3. If you would like to have **sick leave buyback spread throughout your final year** before your retirement, you need to notify Steve Barrasso in writing by February 1. (This just gives you the money a little bit earlier, but does not effect your retirement pension.)

4. If you are planning **to change lanes** (e.g. move from the Master pay lane to the Masters + 45 credits pay lane) any time in the next year, you need to put it in writing to Steve Barrasso by March 1. Be sure that all of your hard work will pay off, and you will get the pay raise you deserve when you deserve it (missing this deadline could mean you have to wait until the September of 2007 for the raise).

a. e-mail or send a note to Steve Barrasso for all course and lane change pre-approvals

b. even if you are not sure that you will complete the necessary courses next year, you should notify Steve Barrasso by February 1st

c. once you have completed the necessary courses, fill out a change of category form and submit it to the personnel office as soon as possible (forms can be found in your school office or the personnel office).

5. All requests for **voluntary transfers** are to be made in writing and presented to Steve Barrasso by March 1st, still. (These requests can be kept confidential if requested.)

6. You generally must notify Steve Barrasso in writing of your retirement by April 1 to receive the **91-92 severance pay**, for teachers who were employed in the 1991-92 school year.

7. There are many different deadline for leaves associated with the **birth or adoption of a baby**. The earliest is 5 months before birth. If you are in the process of applying for adoption or are pregnant, we strongly suggest you contact the BEU (617-277-0251) ASAP to learn more about your rights and receive our "Adoption and Pregnancy Packet."

The BEU urges you to make your plans known as soon as you can commit. The sooner the administration knows, the better for everyone. But...don't let these deadlines pass you by! All of these deadlines are also listed in the BEU's publication of the Master Calendar.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call the BEU at 617-277-0251. One of the following grievance committee members will get back in touch with you.

Gretchen Albertini (Devotion)	Sandy Downes (Lawrence)
Deb Allen (Devotion)	Jennifer Hanaghan (BHS)
John Abramson (Unit B)	Barbara Hedges (Runkle)
Dominique Aumiller (BHS)	Cathy Heller (Unit B)
Gerri Belle (Runkle)	Steve Lantos (BHS)
Jody Curran (BHS)	Susan Moreno (BHS)
Chari Dalsheim (Heath)	David Weinstein (Pierce)

Advance notice:



## READ ACROSS AMERICA

Mark **Thursday, March 2**, as Read Across America Day. The BEU will be sponsoring events in all our schools to celebrate this national day of reading. Details are coming out soon and we will then be asking for lots of you to participate. In the meantime, we're looking for volunteers to help organize. Call us at 617-277-0251. Thanks.

### THE ELBO *continued from page 1*

say the taxpayers have to pick up the difference. What they DON'T say is that if the state hadn't raided our systems years ago, there would BE no unfunded liability, and, coupled with the 11% retirement raid on our salaries, the system would be FLUSH with money.

As the union reports on retirement issues here and electronically, we know that many members are far from retirement, and their eyes glaze over...not that you don't care about your more "senior" colleagues...but it's certainly not an immediate issue. The truth is that 11% comes from your pay every check for retirement, and you don't have a choice in the matter. That should be VERY real to you. The contribution rate was 5% for years, then slowly rose to 11%. That's highway robbery - actuaries have told us we more than pay for our retirement. In addition, should you leave teaching in your first 10 years, they'll return only the principal of your deductions. After ten years ("vesting") they return your principal plus interest...at a pathetic rate. In our statements from the Teachers Retirement System each year, we get 1-4% interest on our accounts, even though the system invests your contribution and earns (last year) over 10%...and last year was a bad year for their investments. This system is set up gradually to make up the "unfunded liability" from the days when state government pillaged our retirement funds. The state is supposed to kick in some money, too; but every time they have a problem, they defer the payments they owe us. WE are not allowed to do that, though. At this point, our retirement fund is about 60% funded, and should be fully funded, if nothing changes, by 2018. You may not be ready to retire, but pay attention to what happens - it's your \$\$\$!

The PERAC Board plans to vote next week on eliminating this benefit. If they do eliminate it, the union will be working to minimize the damage. At the state level we will work to "grandfather" anyone currently in the middle of the ELBO and, possibly if you are about to enter into it. It appears those who have already retired are safe. After the rules and grandfathering is settled, the BEU will work on the local level with the School Committee to bargain any impact on employees.

So what do you do if you're thinking of signing up for the benefit starting next year (the deadline is February 1)? That's a very good question. In most instances it seems that you should continue to act as if PERAC will not change the rules. But to be sure, call the BEU at 617-277-0251 for advice for your particular situation.

- Phil Katz, BEU President and  
Paul Phillips, Quincy Education Association President

## YOU HAVE RIGHTS: USE 'EM OR LOSE 'EM!

The right to all your contractual benefits, the right to representation when you believe a meeting with your supervisor could lead to discipline, the right to a fair evaluation, to a safe workplace, to protections under the law, to file a grievance without fear of reprisal: all these rights are yours for the using. And like old bones, they get creaky when not exercised.

Know your contract. Your BEU contract won't keep you reading into the wee hours, but it's a good idea to have a general familiarity with its contents and the work rights it gives you. Take 15 minutes to at least skim it. It may be very revealing.

Get representation. Whether it's a meeting about your evaluation, a difficult parent or classroom or work situation, or an "investigatory interview" where you feel you're being called on the carpet, if you feel at all uncomfortable, get a BEU rep immediately. Request that the meeting be postponed until your rep is available. This is within your Weingarten Rights, which have been addressed in a previous newsletter and are also in the front of the BEU's printed Master Calendar.

Get to know the evaluation instrument and procedures. And remember, call your BEU rep early and often when problems with performance evaluation begin to surface. In

my experience, we've never failed to make a truly positive difference for everyone when we are on the scene early.

Your good health is your greatest possession. And the strength of the BEU – the strength you give it with your support – will help you safeguard your health as the BEU negotiates health and safety conditions and works through its Health and Safety Committee. But you need to speak out when you're the least bit concerned about this matter in your building or area. Again, call us early and often. Don't wait until it's too late.

The contract and the law are your "Bill of Rights." use them. Help us help you and together we will make a difference. The track record is clear. What the BEU has been able to accomplish through the activism of its members matters to each and every one of you. Together you've worked hard for what you have. You have to work hard to keep it.

It's a tried and true formula: when union members are fearless in exercising their rights, everyone gains, individually and collectively. And it is my personal belief that the whole school system gains when its employees are not afraid to act on their own behalf based on their legitimate rights. To do so, after all, is the hallmark of a free and democratic society.

*-Dorine Levasseur, MTA Field Rep*

## A COURSE ON ANTI-RACIST TEACHING METHODS

I recently finished a course offered by EDCO called "Anti-Racist Teaching Methods for All Students." It is a three-credit course offered by Empowering Multicultural Initiatives (EMI), which you might remember being called Eastern Massachusetts Initiatives. The class quite simply changed my life. EMI 1 discusses the history of racism in the United States, and allows you to face your own prejudices and beliefs, so that you can analyze where you are in your racial identity development and decide how you can become an ally for others. EMI 2 takes the ideas from the first course and focuses on curriculum development- how teachers can analyze their curriculum to make it culturally relevant to their students. As a math teacher, I'm particularly interested in taking this course. If you've taken it, I'd love to hear about it.

Before this class, I believed that low achievement in school by students of color was based entirely on socioeconomic status- that, as I said in my Taping Project (the first assignment, done prior to the first class, where I audio taped myself answering some questions about race and achievement), "because of money, white kids do better in school." I know now that I contribute daily to the academic achievement gap with my unconscious low expectations; students do well when they feel that their teachers expect them to. I have evidence of that fact- students in my class performed better on average on the last test I gave when I told them that there would be infinite

opportunities for them to retest if they failed it (my usual test retake policy is that you can retake it only once). I imparted the expectation that they WILL learn this material, no matter how long it takes. And the result wasn't that I had a classroom full of kids taking tests every day after school. They did so well the first time that only two kids needed a retest, and the one who remembered to take it did fabulously.

What I learned from taking this course:

- there's more to racism than cross burnings and the N-word
- the best way to start closing the achievement gap is to change the way that I teach, not necessarily by changing how the students learn
- tracking often does more harm than good

I bring this class up because if you are going to be the educator you got into this business to be, you will take this class. It is so important. Not only does it make you a better teacher, it makes you a better human being.

Anyone who wants information on taking this course can contact Elli Stern at [elli.stern@comcast.net](mailto:elli.stern@comcast.net). As of Tuesday, Jan. 10th, there are some sections of EMI1 open on Tuesdays in Wellesley and Wednesdays in Bedford, but the Saturday class (in Needham, I think) is full. There will be one offered this summer as well, and people should look for an email about that in March.

*-Tamisha Simpson, Driscoll*



## TIMING THE MARKET

To Almost Everything There Is A Season: Timing The Market

Why can't you wait until you think the market is going up and 'time' the investment?" my sister innocently and reasonably inquired about investing her 401k into a group of mutual funds. My answer was succinct and unequivocal: "No one successfully and consistently times the market."

Over the past 50 years an endless parade of pretenders and pundits have presented themselves as market seers. Does anyone remember Elaine Garzarelli, a financial analyst from Lehman Brothers, who predicted the 1987 stock market crash? For a couple of years, you couldn't turn on CNBC or open up a financial magazine without being greeted by Ms. Garzarelli's annoying Cheshire cat smile. Today, much like the body of the Carroll's Cheshire cat, Garzarelli has faded into oblivion.

The mutual fund industry has no shortage of would-be market timers who have cost mutual fund investors hundreds of millions. The poster child has to be Garroth Van Wagoner. In 1999 his fund Emerging Growth Fund (VWEGX) returned a spectacular 291% for the year. Not surprisingly, many investors -- most of whom neglected to investigate his fund's alarming long term record -- practically broke down his office door in 2001 to invest in this express train to success. Lo and behold, this hot fund morphed into a virtual financial iceberg over the past five years with an average yearly return of -29%. (If you had invested \$100,000 in 2001, you would be left with \$11,000 of your original investment!)

The time-tested approach to successful investing eschews the "best of the year" mutual fund darlings of the financial press. The best long-term strategy for successful investing is anchored in common sense, careful research, and selection of a diversified group of funds with consistent long term track records, low costs, and seasoned management teams. This is the true strategy for all seasons.

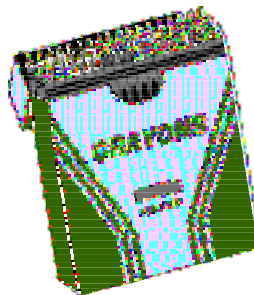
The last word on market-timing belongs to John C. Bogle, investment icon, founder of Vanguard and a pioneer in the mutual fund industry (from Common Sense on Mutual Funds):

*The idea that a bell rings to signal when investors should get into or out of the stock market is simply not credible. After nearly fifty years in business, I do not know of anybody who has done it successfully and consistently.*

**-Robert Miller, Devotion**

### The President's Hours for December

- Negotiations - 52.5 hours
  - Grievances/Complaints - 50
  - Internal communications - 15.5
  - Internal Meetings - 13.5
  - Organizing Members - 10
  - Other Meetings with Management - 9.5
  - Doing paperwork, staying organized - 9
  - Work with MTA & NEA - 5.5
  - Community Relations - 5.5
  - Membership Work/Finances - 4.5
  - Health & Safety - 2.5
  - Professional Development - 1.5
  - Benefits -1
- This totals 180.5 hours for the 4 weeks starting December 5



## BEU CALENDAR

### Walmart Movie and Descsion

Feb 2 BHs MLKing 3:00pm

### Executive Board Meeting

Feb 6 BHS Room 250 2:45pm

### Deadline for October Articles

Feb 7

### Reps Council Meeting

Feb 13 BHS MLKing Room 2:45pm

### October Brookline Educator

Feb 16

### February Vacation

Feb 20 thru Feb 24

### BEU Committees

Feb 27 various locals 2:45pm

### Read Across America

Mar 2 everywhere all day

*We hope you enjoy this newsletter and find it informative. If you are represented by the BEU but are not a member, we ask you to join us.*

*Please note: Non-members represented in Units A and B and non-members employed more than 3 years in the Para Unit are responsible for paying an agency service fee, about 75% of the dues and billed late spring or summer.*

### THE BROOKLINE EDUCATOR

Published monthly by the Brookline Educators Union, affiliated with the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the National Education Association. Send letters, comments, inquiries, and articles to:

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Philip Katz, President

This issue went to press on 1/13/05

Printed on recycled paper