

# BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

March 2006

## READ ACROSS BROOKLINE

On March 2, 2006 many teachers and community members united to celebrate Read Across America with our students. Reading parties took place around Brookline celebrating reading on Theodor Suess Geisel's birthday. We reached out to bring members of the community into our fabulous schools to read children's books. We worked to raise awareness about the importance, value, and fun of reading throughout the year. Moreover, we impressed our visitors with our high educational standards, dedication and well informed student body.

Teachers, as usual, went above and beyond expectations to volunteer to take part in this celebration. When I reached out to Brookline teachers to participate, I was overwhelmed by the number of volunteers. The fun and success of RAA depends on a lot of extra work by our staff and we clearly have a group of teachers who are excited about reading, teaching and learning.

All of this hard work is worth it when you see the reaction from our students. My students eagerly listened to a story read by local author Jay Daly. After the story, I watched as each child proudly took a book that he/she wrote to share with a colleague. Jill Puelo, from Lawrence School, wrote about her experience, "Chief O'Leary came to my class to read and was a delight. He patiently listened to all the tales the students had to tell about the time they fell off their bike (he had read a book on safety tips Officer Buckle), or their brother or sister fell off their bike. Then he answered every question that they threw at him. But what was most touching was when I asked him to sit in a chair in the middle of my class so the kids could gather around for a picture. There he is posing, and the kids can't get close enough to him. Then after the photo was taken, each kid had to feel the patch on his sleeve, the stars on his shoulder, and the badge on his chest. Without blinking an eye he took off his badge so each child could hold it in their hand to inspect it a little more. He spent almost an hour of his time with us, and the students couldn't have been more thrilled."

Read Across America is a wonderful way to open our classrooms up to the community. Thank you to all who were involved, volunteered, and applauded this special day. I am looking forward to RAA 2008.

*-Eowyn Daly, Pierce*

## THE PERILS OF E-MAIL

Many of us have learned – often the hard way – how easy it is to vent one's spleen and hit the "Send" button. A recent Boston Globe article about an e-mail exchange between an attorney and a woman who'd applied for a job in his firm illustrated in spades just how dangerous this can be. Because the attorney was irritated at how his job offer had been received and then expressed that irritation to the applicant who responded curtly and rudely, the attorney forwarded the exchange to a colleague telling him he could e-mail it to whomever he wanted. Hundreds then read these e-mails and drew their own conclusions about each of the correspondents. Needless to say, neither came out smelling pretty.

A very good piece of advice can be derived from that article: do not put in an e-mail anything you wouldn't want the rest of the world to read and that you are not willing to see preserved forever in history. It was indiscriminate use of e-mail, in part, that brought down Enron and lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

At the workplace, there are even more concerning issues. Remember that the technology belongs to the employer, who retains a proprietary right to supervise and monitor its use. You should not expect that your e-mails are protected by privacy rights. "You don't want to use the company system to send personal messages that come back to embarrass you or your family." (Globe, p. G6, 2/5/06, "Nothing considered personal about e-mail at work.")

As educational professionals, you use e-mail to communicate with each other and with parents. Your electronic communications could become part of a public record in a lawsuit completely unrelated to you in the discovery process. With the escalating number of special education litigation cases, for example, it is completely plausible that e-mail communications about the child in question will be demanded and reviewed.

So what about free speech rights? Well, the courts have ruled on a number of cases governing free speech in the workplace. Among other factors, the courts look at balancing the interests of free speech against the employer's interests in whether the speech impedes relations among co-workers or a

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**MONDAY, MARCH 27**

**RALLY! RAP! UPDATE! MOBILIZE! ASSEMBLE!**

**COME TO THE LIVE NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE MEETING  
AT YOUR SCHOOL AND BE HEARD AND BE COUNTED**

## PARA CONTRACT HIGHLIGHTS



Before 1997, Paras had no contract nor were they represented by a union. In three rounds of negotiations over the years, we've made a lot of progress and this year we're looking to make more. Here are some highlights from the current contract.

### Work Week and Work Days

A full time para schedule is 7.5 hours a day (or 37.5 hours per week), but most paras (special ed aides) only work 6 hours per day or 0.8 FTE). Paras are paid hourly and should not be expected to work any more than their contracted hours.)

### Meal Breaks

If scheduled over 6 hours in a day, Paras must get a 30 minute duty free lunch break. If scheduled over 5 hours in a day, Paras may get a 30 minute duty free lunch break. If you work through your lunch time, you get to leave 30 minutes early.

### Overtime

Paras who are approved to work extra time and up to 40 hours/week can get compensatory time and must be allowed to take it within 14 days. If not granted comp time, then Paras are paid straight time up to 40 hrs/week, then time and a half for over that.

### Holidays

- 12 month para: working on holiday, double time.
- 10 month para: no vacation time.

### Building Emergencies, Closings, Cancellations and Late Openings

- 12 month: can be scheduled for comp time, otherwise is paid
- 10 month: no change, day is made up at end of school year

### Sick Leave

- 12 month: 12 days per year.
- 10 month: 10 days per year.

### FMLA

- 12 month: 12 days for serious condition of family member.
- 10 month: 10 days for serious condition of family member.

### Sick Leave Bank

- Eligible after 5 years of employment.
- Limited to 45 days per contract year.

### Administrative Leave ("A" Days)

- 12 month para: 3 days.
- 10 month para: 2 days.

### Training Responsibility

- The employer is responsible for training Paras.
- Vouchers available for classes at some local institutions.

### Non-renewal

- Every year on or before June 15 (May 1 for 12-month paras), until employed 5 years, then every 2 years.

### Layoff

- Can't be laid off or have your hours reduced after Oct. 15 unless grant funding for position is cut.

### Dismissal and Suspension

- Two year probationary period, no reason required.
- After probationary period, good cause required.

### Notice Of Vacancies

- Posted at town hall and sent via e-mail to BEU president.

### Effects of ESEA

- If requirements not met, BSC will try to transfer the para to a different position.

### Agency Service Fee

- Paras are responsible for paying reasonable fees to the BEU only starting in their fourth year.

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)

## THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH HEALTH AND SAFETY!

Here's an idea worth considering that several school systems have adopted: a student health council. If you do it in your classroom, students take responsibility for "healthy" actions for their entire class. One idea is to start with a health fair where students give mini-presentations or have "booths." These could include presenting games that promote healthy eating (looking at cafeteria offerings), getting exercise, classroom set-up (where you place backpacks, carrying scissors....) After the fair, students can take responsibility for keeping classroom surfaces free of germs, planning class walks in nice weather or designing 5 minute exercise breaks for the class, making sure that no food is left open in the classroom,... The possibilities are endless and it shares the responsibility of making the room a safe and healthy place.

*-Sally Dean, Heath*

## TEACH OVERSEAS

Have you ever wanted to experience life in another country? The Fulbright Association sponsors educators to work in another school system overseas. There are programs that are year long programs and summer programs. Several teachers in Brookline has taken advantage of this opportunity. Don't pass up the option to teach and/or visit abroad. You can contact Gale Holdren who is in charge of the Fulbright Hays Seminars Abroad at:

U.S. Department of Education, 6th Floor, 1990 K St. N.W.  
Washington, D.C.20006-8521  
202-502-7691  
202-502-7859 fax  
email: [gale.holdren@ed.gov](mailto:gale.holdren@ed.gov)  
[www.ed.gov/programs/legpssap/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/legpssap/index.html)

*-Johanna Roses, Baker*

## WE ARE THE BEU

Listed below are all the school employees represented by the BEU and in what bargaining unit they are. Our membership is made up of those employees who join the organization.

**Unit A:** teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, librarians, assistant librarians and lab specialists.

**Unit B:** mid-level administrators including curriculum coordinators, program coordinators, vice principals and directors (of Instructional Technology, Athletics and Science & Career Ed).

**Para Unit:** aides, tutors, computer technicians, permanent substi-

tutes, security personnel, METCO bus monitors, parent liaisons, several others.

School employees represented by other town unions: secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers and bus monitors.

Those school employees NOT represented by a union at this time: Superintendent, Deputy and Assistant Superintendents, Principals, Headmaster, Assistant Headmaster, Deans, Coordinator of Grants, Supervisor of Adult Ed, Director of Professional Development, daily substitutes, those working just in homework centers and a few others.

Keeping In Touch With Your Health Insurance...

### HEALTH INCREASE

At present, our carrier, Blue Cross, has proposed a premium increase of about 14% for next year, with coverage and co-pays remaining the same as this year. Our advisory board is considering putting our health insurance policy out to bid.

It is a long and difficult process, but often leads to better rates or coverages (sometimes it doesn't). Will keep you informed.

**Health Fair...** will be held in the Public Library, on the 2nd floor this year. It is scheduled for May 3rd, 12-4 PM. It is a very informative fair, with representatives from the insurance company, social security office, and other interesting companies. Date has been set during open enrollment time (May 1-12) to help you to get answers to help you make any necessary decisions if you are thinking about changing your plans. They usually have technicians who do blood pressure, cholesterol, and sugar tests with results immediately. Last year, they had a wonderful massage therapist who did neck massages. These are just a few of the guests. Refreshments are served. Do try to come!

**Employee Wellness Program...** Take a few minutes and complete and return the Employee Wellness Interest Survey. Human Resources is in the process of developing programs for the upcoming year, and would appreciate your input. If you did not get the survey form, you may contact Kathy McGinnis at 617-730-2120 for a copy.

A good change in our **Flexible Spending Plan...** The IRS has agreed to a 75 day carry-over of your flexible spending funds so you may use up the remainder of your previous year's plan. As you know, at present, you lose any excess that remains as of June 30th.

My last reminder for 2005 Fitness Clubs and Weight Watchers rebates of up to \$150 each. **FORMS MUST BE FILED AND RECEIVED BY BLUE CROSS BY MARCH 31st.** I don't want anyone of our members to not receive what is due to them. I do know most of you have already sent in the forms and probably spent the money. Hope you had fun.

- Elly Finkel

### BEU E-MAIL CONFERENCES

Do you have access to all the BEU conferences that you should? The BEU runs five conferences:

**BEU** – for all members. This conference is where an immense amount of important information is disseminated and interesting discussions take place.

**Unit B** – for all employees in Unit B, members and non-members alike. This conference has postings related directly to mid-level administrators.

**Para Unit** – for all employees in the Para Unit, members and non-members alike. This conference has postings related directly to the paraprofessionals.

**Executive Board** – only for members of the BEU Executive Board.

**Reps Council** – this is mainly for BEU Representatives, but also for members of the Executive Board, the negotiations team, grievance team and other union leaders.

If you should, but do not, have access to one or more of these conferences, please e-mail Phil Katz. If you do not have an e-mail account and would like one (all employees can get one), please contact Steve Barrasso (at x2410, or get someone else to e-mail him).

#### E-MAIL-

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supervisor's ability to maintain discipline.

Does this mean you should be worried about "Big Brother"? No, but you should exercise discretion. In any monitoring of e-mail or internet use, the employer has to bargain with the Union about policies and procedures and then convey those policies and procedures to the employees. Even so, just as it is not necessary for the employer to warn you that stealing is a punishable offense, you know from general standards of reasonableness and discretion, that certain uses of the school district's technology could never be defended. Be smart and be cautious.

AND, as with any other work situation, if you encounter a problem with administration, call the Union immediately.

-Dorine Levasseur, MTA Field Rep



## FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS EXPENSIVE RATIOS



One of the first lessons of “Investing in Mutual Funds 101” deals with the often onerous, mutual fund expense ratio. The expense ratio is the mutual fund’s operating costs assessed as a percentage of the assets used to cover expenses. For teachers, many of whom are mired in insurance company annuities, this seemingly simple task of factoring in a fund’s expense ratio is complicated by an unexpected obstacle: finding the expense ratio in the fund prospectus haystack and then trying to understand the fund’s convoluted fee structure.

All mutual funds assess basic fees, including a management fee, administrative fee (record keeping, mailings, maintaining a customer service), and a 12b-1 distribution fee- for marketing and advertising. The industry average expense ratio falls in the 1.25% range. A mutual fund with a 1.25% expense ratio imposes a fee of \$125.00 for every \$10,000 in assets.

Annuity Companies, like mutual funds, are obligated by SEC regulations to provide investors with a prospectus that identifies all fees. But the prospectus is often a voluminous and inscrutable document where finding all the fees can remind you of playing “Where’s Waldo?” Perhaps the most infuriating and discouraging aspect of the annuity company fee structure is the “stealth insurance charge.” How many teachers realize they are paying an additional 1% a year, on top of the average 1.25% expense ratio, for a virtually useless life insurance policy?\*

Perhaps the most painful and most punitive annuity fee is the “surrender charge.” Teachers typically only discover this “ball and chain” fee when they try and transfer their money from their current annuity company to a real mutual fund company like Vanguard or a T. Rowe Price. Surprise, you need to pay an exit fee to leave your annuity that can represent as much as 10% of your invested assets.

If you’re currently contributing to your 403b through an annuity company, it may be time to investigate your fund’s expense ratio. Fortunately, there are alternatives to enduring the costly fees imposed by the annuity companies. With a little homework, you can find funds with a reasonable fee structure, no “surrender charge,” and no 1% insurance policy. Two noteworthy examples are Vanguard Wellington (VWELX) which imposes a rock bottom expense ratio of .29% and T. Rowe Price Equity Income (TRFDX), a reasonable .74%.

\*The annuitant (you, the investor) is guaranteed a death benefit equal to the amount invested in the policy. In short, a return equal to an investment in a money-market paying no interest!

*-Robert Miller, Devotion*

### The President’s Hours for February

Grievances/Complaints - 54 hours  
 Negotiations - 47.5  
 Internal Meetings - 12  
 Organizing Members - 12  
 Internal communications - 9  
 Other Meetings with Management - 6.5  
 Doing paperwork, staying organized - 6  
 Community Relations - 6  
 Work with MTA & NEA - 5.5  
 Membership Work/Finances - 2.5  
 Professional Development - 2  
 Benefits -0.5  
 This totals 163.5 hours for the 4 weeks starting Jan 30



## BEU CALENDAR

### Live Nego Update Rally

Mar 27 in each school TBA

### Executive Board Meeting

Apr 3 BHS Room 250 2:45pm

### Deadline for April Articles

Apr 4

### Reps Council Meeting

Apr 10 BHS MLKing Room 2:45pm

### April Brookline Educator

April 13

### School Vacation

April 14 through April 23

### BEU Committees

Apr 24 various locals 2:45pm

### MTA Annual Meeting

May 5 Boston 12:30 pm

May 6 Boston 9:00 am

*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

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Amie Buchman, Communications Chair  
 Philip Katz, President

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