

BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

January 2007

HEALTH CARE NEGOTIATIONS

The BEU contracts allow the Town to re-open our contracts at any time to discuss changes in health insurance. The Town has recently done so. However, during repeated discussions with the town, the town unions have asked to negotiate changes with all the unions together. These are the BEU, AFSCME (School Custodians, school cafeteria workers, and many town workers) police, fire, school secretaries, engineers and the Teamsters (safety dispatchers). While the BEU leadership does not want to make any changes, we believe any changes should be made by all the unions together because in the end we all must agree to the same plan.

Bargaining is scheduled to start on January 24, under a state law Chapter 32B, Section 19. "Section 19" allows for all the unions to bargain together - and if there is a temporary agreement, to ratify together. If 70% of the unions (in a weighted vote, where the BEU has about 50% of the weight) ratify, then the change goes into effect. An advantage to Section 19, besides allowing all the unions to bargain together, is that the retirees have a vote, thereby giving them (and us) rights to bargain their benefits - something that is not required now.

Stay tuned for more information on how these negotiations continue.

BEU ELECTION NOMINATIONS

POSITIONS OPEN FOR ALL OFFICERS

Nominations are now open for all BEU officers as listed below. Nominations are open only to members of the BEU. You may nominate yourself or others. The timeline for elections is:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| February 2 | Deadline for BEU Officers' nominations. |
| February 9 | Ballots sent out, elections begin. |
| February 26 | Ballots must be received, elections end. |
| February 28 | Election Results for BEU Officers announced. |

(Elections for Delegates to the MTA Annual Meeting and NEA Representative elections will take place in March and April.)

Nominations for BEU Officers:

The positions for President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer are open for election. Please consult the BEU by-laws for the duties of these positions or call the BEU office at 617-277-0251. Please indicate your nominations below:

For President: Name(s) _____

For Vice-President: Name(s) _____

For Secretary: Name(s) _____

For Treasurer: Name(s) _____

Send this form ASAP to Stacy Kissel at BHS so it arrives by February 2

This nomination form is also on the BEU e-mail conference.
If you are a BEU member and don't have access to that conference,
please e-mail Phil Katz for gaining access.
The Elections Committee this year is: Stacy Kissel and Ed Wisner



COMPLAINTS, COMPLAINTS...NOW WHAT?

It's happened to many of us, perhaps to you. Your supervisor calls a meeting with you or writes you a note: "Several parents have contacted me about your (class on Tuesday, talking about personal issues, using X materials with the students). I'd like to talk with you about it" What do you do?

First of all, take a deep breath, and calm your pounding heart. Then, schedule a meeting with your supervisor if it has not already been done. This is not something to be discussed in the hall as you rush by each other or via e-mail.

Our contracts (6.11) dictate that you must be notified in advance of the purpose of any meeting where disciplinary action is contemplated, and that you have the right to have BEU representation. Be sure to inform your supervisor who will be coming with you.

Once in the meeting, there are several things to keep in mind concerning the process of the meeting and the content. First, the process:

- Write things down: often the person with you can do this to help you out.
- Listen carefully: it is much more important to listen than to speak.
- Try not to get defensive. This can often lead to panic and over explaining and unnecessary anger or stress.
- Be very clear that you understand what the supervisor is asking you to do, if anything. Ask him/her to repeat, if necessary. Write it down.
- Don't agree to anything in a panicked haste. Stop and think before speaking.
- At the end of the meeting, if appropriate, thank the supervisor for the information and let him/her know that you will get back to them within 24 hours when you've had a chance to think about what was said.
- Always remember, if a supervisor orders you to do something, you must do it unless there is some real health or safety reason not to. You can always contact one of the grievance team members with questions. Don't be insubordinate.

As to the content of the meeting, the Brookline Schools policy about this situation is that the supervisor, when contacted by a parent or other, should tell that person to speak directly to the teacher. That being said, we know it doesn't always happen. Here's what you might ask the supervisor:

- Who contacted the supervisor?
- Did the supervisor ask this person to contact you?
- Is this the only call, or has it happened repeatedly. If repeatedly, why hasn't it come up before?
- If necessary, and if it feels safe, remind the supervisor of the school system policy.

As a final note, nothing should ever, ever appear in your personnel files about it. Anonymous complaints do not live up to standard of due process since you cannot fully challenge such complaints as is your right. If you are concerned that something might have gone into your file, contact the BEU Grievance team right away.

There is specific contract language about derogatory material in your file. "Should any material which the BSC (Brookline School Committee) shall consider to be derogatory be placed in the teacher's personnel folder, then the teacher involved will be given the opportunity to review same prior to its placement in the personnel folder. The employee shall initial such material prior to its insertion. The employee's initials do not signify agreement with the contents, but rather serve as evidence that the employee has seen the material in question" (6.6)

This means that if there is any derogatory material in your file, it should have your initials on it. In addition, the contract states that you may submit a statement to be put in the file along with the derogatory material and they must be filed together in your personnel folder (6.6).

In addition, if the allegedly derogatory material could result in discipline or affect an educator's status, then it must be sent to that educator within 20 school days, and to nurses within 7 working days (6.6)

Also, the file in the Human Resources office is not necessarily the only file containing your employment records. Personnel files can also be in any administrator's files: principal, vice principal, headmaster, dean, curriculum coordinator, program coordinator. Contractual language applies to all these files.

If there is derogatory material in your file that you believe to be unfair, untrue, exaggerated, or has some other problem, again, contact the Grievance Team. The same is true if you believe that one or more documents may be missing. If there are any anonymous complaints, again, contact the Grievance team. The BEU's position is that anything with no name attached does not exist and cannot be used.

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.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| John Abramson (Unit B) | Robert Grant (BHS) |
| Gretchen Albertini (Devo) | Barbara Hedges (Runkle) |
| Deb Allen (Devotion) | Cathy Heller (Unit B) |
| Gerri Belle (Runkle) | Steve Lantos (BHS) |
| Jody Curran (BHS) | Susan Moreno (BHS) |
| Chari Dalsheim (Heath) | Ben Schwartz (Para) |
| Sandy Downes (Retired) | Jill Sifantus (BHS) |
| | Susan Stark (BHS) |

EDUCATOR FOR A DAY

On Friday, March 2, we will be inviting community members to share the vibrancy and complexity of our work first hand. You will have a chance to sign up to be a host soon. Members in all positions are encouraged to host and we are excited that aides seem particularly interested this year. More information will be coming soon on the BEU e-mail conference and in an upcoming bulletin. If you can't wait, get in touch with Eowyn Daly or Phil Katz.

CHANGES AND QUESTIONS



We start 2007 with the State of Massachusetts passing a sweeping health care reform act (passed in July 2006, but effective now). Since the Town of Brookline is already mandated to provide health care coverage to those employed half time or more, there is little in this law that will effect most of us.

However, there is one change that may be good for some of us: effective January 1, 2007, the new law mandates that the employer continue to cover all dependents until the age of 25, or 2 years after they are no longer dependents (as declared on your income tax forms); whichever occurs first. Our current plan covers dependents only if they are full-time students. So some of those who make COBRA payments may no longer need to.

Brookline is currently figuring out just how to implement this change--

- 1) how to move dependents back into their parents' account,
- 2) how to have an open enrollment period for those with newly eligible dependents.

Once Brookline figures this out; we will give you the information; It will save those involved a good deal of money.

Two questions have come in and I wish to share the answers with all of you:

Are chiropractors covered by our policy?

Yes, just as with your primary doctor, your co-pay is \$5.00--20 visits annually with Blue Cross network chiropractors. Out of network, \$250 deductible, and then 20% deductible from fee.

Is acupuncture covered by our policy?

Sorry, no.

Keep sending questions, I'll get the answers, and print them anonymously in this column. It may help your co-workers.

The usual reminder: 2006 is over. If you have been a member of a health club or a hospital based weight loss center, or Weight Watchers for 4 months or more during this year (if you started your insurance as late as September 1st (4 months) you are eligible for up to \$150 rebate. **You must send in a form and a copy of your paid bill so that it is received by March 30.** I have forms, or you can download it from the Blue Cross website. Don't lose a rebate that is due you (believe me, some do).

Happy and Healthy 2007!

-Elly Finkel, Health Care Chair

HEALTH AND SAFETY TIP

Over the vacation, heating filters were changed in all schools. If you are having a problem with the heat system in your room, please talk to the custodian. Some blowers were inadvertently turned off and not reset, resulting in cold classrooms. The cold weather has finally arrived and several teachers have commented about icy walkways. The town salts/sands parking lots, sidewalks and walkways but the custodians also have a limited supply of sand to place on entrance ways or other icy paths.

-Sally Dean, Runkle

KINDERGARTEN ISSUES, PART 3

For most children, kindergarten is a child's first exposure to a large school setting with decreased adult presence. A significant part of the year is spent introducing and guiding both children and families through school culture, both because they come from such diverse childcare settings and because the experience is so new.

Even as the demands for an accelerated kindergarten have increased, we know that five- and six-year-olds have remained essentially the same. They are still very young children. Their limited tolerance for waiting and their limited ability to stay engaged in independent tasks require the continuous attention of adults.

Kindergarten children generally cannot yet read. There is no "read the instructions and if you have any questions, let me know." Teachers are ever present to help children follow directions, interact purposefully with materials, follow through on tasks, and resolve social conflicts. Many children come to us with a variety of special needs that have not yet been identified. Because these children are not yet receiving services, extra adult help in the classroom is essential.

Now that we have had full day kindergarten in Brookline for six years, a number of us felt it would be a good time to take a look at how it is going. During the 2004-2005 school year the 23 kindergarten teachers began a study of the current state of kindergarten in Brookline.

While a full day provides more time for curriculum, for play, and for social and emotional development, teachers also see the advantages of more early intervention, more attention to our most needy children, and the opportunity for more student/teacher interaction and conversation.

We mostly agree that the full day addresses the equity of experience for families of all income levels and racial and ethnic backgrounds and promotes a better preparation for Brookline first grade. Children now have better access to specials (art and music, etc.), although this is not entirely consistent town-wide. Kindergarten teachers now have the full-time status (and pay) that reflects the reality of our teaching work all along.

There are some teachers who see less benefit from full day kindergarten in its current model. From their perspective, the longer day provides primarily child care time, because kids are too tired to benefit from more instruction and much of the extra time is eaten up by transitions, lunch, and specials.

Many of the things that work well for us in kindergarten are the same things that make for good schools throughout Brookline: wonderful colleagues, talented teachers, access to books and materials, support for creative teaching, and our skilled guidance counselors, specialists, and social workers. We appreciate and foster strong parent support, take advantage of curriculum support, and have been actively working towards an increased collaboration among and across grade levels.

It is important to remember the developmental needs of even those students who are typical five year olds. Young children need support with many parts of their day that older children can manage more independently. Tying shoelaces, dealing with lunch, putting on coats, and washing hands, all require close supervision and a lot of assistance. In addition, each year there are also a few children who are simply not ready to be in kindergarten.

Brookline has seen increased curriculum demands and expectations for academic achievement in kindergarten. Some kindergarten teachers have reported unrealistic pressure from supervisors.

continued on page 4

SUBBING IN BROOKLINE

Did you know there are six kinds of substitutes (subs) in the Brookline Public Schools? You may ask: why do I need to know? Good question. You may never need to know, but sooner or later it may come up in your work situation or that of a colleague. Besides, aren't you curious? The six kinds can be sorted into the following three categories:

1. **Daily Subs** are hired on a day to day basis (sometimes a bit longer term), and also called *per diem subs*. Their daily pay this year is \$83 with no degree (can only substitute for an aide), \$90 with a degree and \$95 per day if they worked for Brookline more than 60 days (not necessarily consecutive or in the same year). Daily Subs are NOT represented by the BEU.

2. **Long Term Subs** are hired for at least 20 consecutive work days in the same position. Their pay is \$160 per day, which will be paid retroactively to the first day in the position if needed. In addition, if a substitute works for more than 8 weeks, his/her pay increases to the teachers' salary scale. Long-Term Subs are NOT represented by the BEU. They are entitled, by law (Chapter 32B), to health insurance, but are often denied this benefit - the BEU cannot help directly as we do not represent them.

3. **System Subs**: are permanent hires (as permanent as any Para position), and sometimes called *building subs* or *permanent subs*, however their assignment to a particular school is only as a home base and they can be assigned anywhere in the school system. Their pay is \$95 per day. There is also a new **System Nurse Sub** position which is paid \$160 per day. System Subs ARE represented by the BEU within the Paraprofessional Contract.

If a System Sub is placed in a long-term teacher sub position, s/he is entitled to the higher amount of pay and continues to be represented by the BEU. If an aide is offered a long-term teacher sub position, s/he is entitled to the higher pay rate, but is no longer in the Para Unit and nor represented by the BEU. However, upon coming back to work as an aide, the time subbing will count toward longevity, benefit accrual, etc.

Finally, if an aide substitutes for an absent teacher, with the prior approval of the principal, the aide will be compensated with \$30.00 per day in addition to his/her normal day's pay.

KINDERGARTEN *continued from page 3*

Some of our problems come from the need to be fit into the scheduling demands set up for older children now that the full day has changed the expectations. Many of our students get very tired after 12:00 or so, especially early in the school year. Their days include many transitions, and schedules are often dictated by the needs of, for instance, the seventh and eighth grade schedules, rather than what is best practice for young children.

Together, the kindergarten teachers have created a document listing a number of suggestions for strengthening and improving the kindergarten program. We are in the process of discussing these proposals with the central administration. Some of our proposals include more academic support and a more gradual entry for our students, better options for misplaced students, and opportunities for training for our aides. If you are interested in seeing the full report, please contact Amie Buchman on e-mail.

The President's Hours for April

Feet on Desk - 24.6
Negotiations - 77 hours
Grievances/Complaints - 53
Organizing Members - 15
Community Relations - 15
Internal communications - 8
Other Meetings with Management - 8
Doing paperwork, staying organized - 7.5
Internal Meetings - 7.5
Health & Safety - 4
Work with MTA & NEA - 3
Membership Work/Finances - 3
Professional Development - 1.5
Benefits - 1



BEU CALENDAR

BEU Financial Seminar

Nov 27 BHS MLK Room 3:00pm

Executive Board Meeting

Dec 4 BHS Room 250 2:45pm

Deadline for December Articles

Dec 5

Reps Council Meeting

Dec 11 BHS MLK Room 2:45pm

December Brookline Educator

Dec 13

BEU Committee Meetings

Dec 18 various locales 3:00pm

Winter Vacation (No School)

Dec 25 thru Jan 1

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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Brookline Educators Union
115 Greenough Street
Brookline, MA 02445
Tel: 617-277-0251
Fax: 617-232-9413

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Amie Buchman, Communications Chair
Philip Katz, President

This issue went to press on