

BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

March 2007

BEU FOCUS ON LEGISLATION

On Monday, March 12, the BEU Representative Council voted on a temporary basis (a full vote will take place next month) to endorse, organize and mobilize for three pieces of legislation. You can expect to hear more from the Community Relations Committee and your Union Reps about these bills.

State Education Funding

State funding for public education (Chapter 70) has not kept pace with inflation or the increase in enrollment. Our funding peaked in 2002 and even that wasn't adequate. We need stable, adequate, long-term funding for public education through out the state. School systems across the state are being forced to make impossible choices: cutting programs and services, increasing class sizes, imposing high fees on busses and after-school activities, and offering inadequate employee contract settlements. Massachusetts ranks 39th in spending on education as a share of personal income and 41st in the share of education funding provided by the state.

The BEU is supporting a bill that would increase state education funding by about \$300 million next year and then establish a committee to determine the resources needed for students to achieve state education standards (which has not been done in 15 years). The study, to be completed by September 2008, would be used to guide state education funding for future years.

MCAS Reform

MCAS has been an important evaluation tool and a key part of broader efforts to invest in and improve our public schools. However, the over-reliance on standardized tests, especially as a must-pass graduation requirement, has contributed to unintended consequences, including:

- increased drop-out rate and lower graduation rate
- narrowing of curricula and "teaching to the test"
- inflated scores that don't reflect real learning
- extreme pressure on students to perform on high-stakes exams
- diversion of school resources away from non-tested subjects and activities

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EDUCATOR FOR A DAY

The BEU's Educator for a Day, on March 2, was another success. This program serves to educate the public on what we do every day. We have all heard it before, "Your job is so easy, summers off, out at 2:30..." or "God, I could never do what you do." This program gives others an inside look at the challenges and joys of teaching. Lisa Guisbond, from FairTest, wrote in detail about her experience:

"I had the remarkable experience of sharing the day with Ginger Watkins and her Lawrence special education class of 10 children, ranging from 1st to 4th grade. It was an amazing thing to see Ginger in action, overseeing her 10 students' individual schedules, needs and interactions with each other. It was something like a ten-ring circus, and she kept all the balls in the air with aplomb and good humor and great sensitivity to each child's individual needs. With the able assistance of her three classroom aides, Usha, Betty and Emily, Ginger has created a dynamic, nurturing and educationally rich environment in which the children clearly feel safe and supported and quite happy much of the time.

"My one wish is that every politician who writes or votes in favor of policies intended to improve education for struggling students or "hold teachers accountable" for providing an excellent education could do just what I did: spend a full school day in the company of Ginger Watkins and her extraordinary students."

Ginger Watkins, Lisa Guisbond's host for the day, thought the day was great as well. "[Lisa] was a delightful addition to our class for the day. Each of the children felt special to entertain a member of community. She was totally flexible, quickly entering into all activities, supporting children's learning, and freely showing her pleasure in meeting them. A pleasure! She even tells us she would like to return for another visit."

This is a lot of work for teachers and it is much appreciated. It is like having another student in the class who needs a lot of special attention. Yet the outcome far out weighs the extra work involved. This day gives teachers a reminder that their job is unique, and that daily learning activities we take for granted are instrumental in shaping the lives of each child. Tanya Paris, Kindergarten at Runkle, wrote, "It was great to be able to share a piece of our kindergarten world with a member from our community. I feel that there are so many wonderful things that happen in our schools but that so few people outside the system truly know or appreciate."

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Hold the Date:

BEU GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MONDAY, APRIL 30, 3:00 BHS AUDITORIUM

Tentative Agenda:

*AFL-CIO Affiliation
Health Care Negotiations Update
School Budget and Deficit
Legislative/Organizing News*



Reminder:

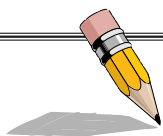
Get that baby-sitter, put on your laughing hat and come hear **Jimmy Tingle** do a show just for us! This political comedian will have you talking for days. Don't miss it.

Sunday, March 25, 7:00pm.

For tickets, go to <http://www.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/5371> or call 866-811-4111

The Contract Corner:

JUST CAUSE



Article 7 of our contract is really short, but if you ever need it, it's also really important! The title of Article 7 is *Just Cause*. What is just cause, who has it, and why does it matter?

Just cause is a labor law term that delineates when and how an employee can be disciplined. There are 6 major elements that constitute just cause. They are:

1. Did the employee understand that her/his conduct would result in disciplinary action?
2. Was the rule violated reasonably related to the safe, efficient and orderly operation of the school (or business)?
3. Did management reasonably ascertain that the employee was in fact guilty of the charge before disciplining the employee?
4. Was the investigation fair and objective?
5. Was management's decision nondiscriminatory?
6. Was the degree of discipline imposed reasonably related to the seriousness of the offense and/or the employee's record of employment (Did the penalty fit the crime and was there progressive discipline?)
7. All things being equal, was the discipline imposed similar to that in other cases for the same offense?

Who in the BEU has just cause? Anyone who has acquired professional teacher status (at the latest, those in Unit A and B on the last day of their third full year), and Paras after 5 years. While it would be fantastic if everyone could be covered, at the moment, that is not the case. In fact, in the last round of bargaining, our negotiators fought hard to get just cause for Paras (who lacked it before) and fend off an attempt to weaken just cause in the Unit B contract.

And why do we need just cause in the contract? Without just cause, discipline can be arbitrary, different for different employees, draconian, and can deprive employees of needed resources.

So, while you hope you will never need it, be appreciative of little Article 7, Just Cause.

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.

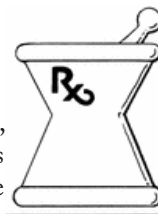
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| John Abramson (Unit B) | Robert Grant (BHS) |
| Gretchen Albertini (Devo) | Barbara Hedges (Runkle) |
| Deb Allen (Devotion) | Cathy Heller (Unit B) |
| Gerri Belle (Runkle) | Steve Lantos (BHS) |
| Jody Curran (BHS) | Susan Moreno (BHS)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

WHERE ARE THOSE CONTRACTS?

We ratified our new contract provisions in October and we still have not seen the re-written contracts. Where are they? The process of folding in the new negotiated provisions as well as a dozen interim agreements reached between 2003 and 2006 takes a while to do correctly and to review to ensure everything is right. But we're almost done. You can expect to see electronic versions within a week or so and a certain number of hard copies within a month.

Keeping In Touch With Your Health Insurance...

NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE



Your Health Care Negotiating Committee, together with the unions of other town departments have been negotiating often this month with the Town of Brookline regarding the provisions of our health insurance policies for next year and the future.

The Town is looking to increase co-pays for office visits, prescription drugs, in-patient and emergency room visits in hospitals. We are looking to protect retiree health insurance (which we will all need some day) and add dental insurance. We continue to meet often, and hope we will get the best possible provisions.

Two Ways For You To Save Some Money:

1) March 31st is the final date for Blue Cross/Blue Shield to receive your forms (with paid bills), for you to receive a rebate of up to \$150 if you were a member of a fitness club for four months during 2006. Another \$150 awaits you if you were a member of a hospital based weight loss program or a Weight Watchers program.

You are entitled to this money, and all you need to do is send in the form. I have some forms, but it is easy to download the form on www.bcbsma.com.

I feel like a nag, but it's worth it if you all get the money that is due to you.

2) Express Scripts: get three months of medicine for the price of one month's. It's easy, and I am always surprised by the low percentage of members that take advantage of this saving. I'll explain it further in next month's article.



-Elly Finkle, Health Care Chair

ED FOR A DAY

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Finally, you can imagine the buzz with the children. They love having guests and showing off their hard work. When visitors walk into the classroom, they send a message: what you do is important. This message and experience is one that they are not likely to forget. Robert Grant, BHS teacher, wrote, "Richard Kazis taught two classes and had kids talking about it in the hall two hours later!"

We may not have had a lot of participants this year, but we sure made an impact. The teachers and guests traveled through the rain storm to an enlightening experience. We want to thank all of the teachers and members of the community who participated:

- Anu Shivdasani - Alan Morse, School Committee
- Mark Goldner - Kevin Stokes, Brookline's Chief Information Officer
- Robert Grant - Richard Kazis
- Michelle Gorden - Helen Charlupski, School Committee
- Tanya Paris - Selma Mayer, Boston University
- Ginger Watkins - Lisa Guisbond, FairTest

-Eowyn Daly, Pierce

INVESTING WITH COPERNICUS: II

A Practical Guide to Global Investing



What if Copernicus were around today to promote a doctrine for global investing? One could easily construct a compelling case for why he would direct investors to look beyond the U.S. markets and embrace an enlightened approach to investing around the globe. In all probability, this investment doctrine would likely revolve around three, crucial 21st century investment facts.

•**Foreign Market Returns:** For the past five consecutive years, beginning in 2001 and ending in 2006 foreign market returns have consistently outpaced the U.S. stock market returns of the S&P 500 and Wilshire 5000. Even if you dismiss the gaudy, Emerging Market stellar returns as the product of a speculative market, stable, European markets have almost doubled the returns of U.S. markets for the past five years.

•**Economic Forecasts:** A recent New York Times article by Paul Lim, “Four Reasons for Your Portfolio to See the World” points out that earnings for the Dow Jones Stoxx index- a benchmark representing equities in 18 European markets- are expected to climb over 8% this year.” That’s a full percentage point more than the 7% growth anticipated for the S&P 500!

•**Diversification:** The U.S. no longer warrants an exclusive position in the global investment galaxy. As Paul Lim points out, it’s time to embrace diversification especially when you consider that more “than half of the world’s stocks market capitalization resides in companies based outside the United States.”

Brookline 403B Global Mutual Fund Options

T. Rowe Price International (TRGIX) A broadly diversified fund with an experienced, steady, value conscious manager. The fund posted a yearly average of 19.53% for the past five years.

Vanguard Global Equity (VHGEX) It’s difficult to find a foreign mutual fund with a more impressive combination of seasoned

management, stellar returns- 18.5% for the past five years and low expenses, .72%.

Fidelity: I gravitate to funds with management continuity that typically augur favorably for predictable returns. A recent Morningstar commentary on Fidelity “Fidelity’s International Lineup in Disarray” leaves me a tad reluctant to highlight a particular fund at this time.

Global Investing Outside Of Your 403B

There are numerous benefits for establishing mutual fund investments outside of your Brookline 403b. First and foremost, your choices are not limited to a single fund family. If you establish a mutual fund brokerage account with a financial institution like Vanguard, T. Rowe Price or Fidelity, you have access to multitude of stellar selections. You might consider beginning your search with three highly recommended funds from Morningstar. Each one of these funds contains the crucial ingredients for long- term success: a successful, long-term track record, seasoned management, and a prudent approach to investing.

1. USAA INTERNATIONAL (USIFX),
2. QUANT FOREIGN VALUE (QFVOX)
3. POLARIS GLOBAL VALUE (PGVFX)

While the U.S. stock market continues to maintain a prominent role in the global investment galaxy, it no longer warrants the preeminent position in an investor’s portfolio. Perhaps it’s time to encircle a Copernican view of global investing where the U.S. isn’t the middle of the investment universe, only a member of the investment galaxy of global choices.

-Robert Miller, Devotion

[Disclaimer: The BEU does not endorse any specific investment options.]

LEGISLATION

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- ignoring important student strengths that standardized tests do not measure: creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and diligence.

The BEU is supporting a bill that would direct the state Board of Education to create a High School Graduation Requirements Committee which will be given the responsibility of developing a multiple assessment system (as the original Ed Reform Law envisioned) to determine student competence. The committee will consist of 31 members representing a wide spectrum of affected parties and educational authorities. In addition, the bill provides that, until the committee develops and implements the new graduation requirements, no student shall be denied a diploma for failing to obtain a passing score on the MCAS.

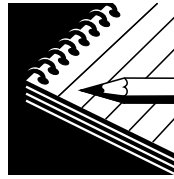
Health and Safety Protection

There are currently no effective laws protecting staff and students from unhealthy and unsafe conditions. There are no programs

currently in place to prevent any unhealthy or unsafe conditions. Too often across the state we hear of unhealthy conditions and “sick buildings” that could have been prevented. Once someone gets sick, it’s too late, and it is much too difficult for employees or users of public buildings (especially students and their parents) to report or follow up on health concerns.

The BEU is supporting a bill that focuses on prevention of unhealthy conditions in schools and public buildings and gives the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Division of Occupational Safety (DOS) enforcement authority. This bill will establish preventative maintenance programs and complaint procedures, visual inspections on an annual basis, comprehensive surveys every five years, require the DPH and the DOS to establish standards concerning conditions that affect indoor environments in public buildings and give those agencies the authority to investigate complaints and to enforce the standards.

TO THE BEU MEMBERSHIP



Now that the election is over, I'd like to thank you for electing me and the other executive board members to your leadership team for the next two years. As I've stated before, I'm excited about this new challenge and look forward to representing you. I'll be continuing with my teaching responsibilities until the end of this school year and then officially taking over from Phil as of July 1, 2007. After that time, you can find me in the BEU office which is located in the basement of the high school. If I'm not in, you can leave a message on the BEU phone.

My goal for the next two years is to work with all of you in maintaining a strong and active union. If you have been active as a rep or on a committee, I hope you will continue. And if you have not stepped forward in the past, but would like to, now would be a great time. There are many ways (with a variety of time commitments) for you to get involved, and we welcome any involvement, no matter how small.

I truly believe that there must be an open channel of communication between the leadership and membership of the union. While some of us have been elected or appointed to speak on your behalf, we must take our cues from you. So please, don't be afraid to speak up about your ideas, either in individual conversations or in larger gatherings. We may not always agree, but open discussion is the mark of a healthy organization. And even better than that is your active participation in building a strong union, one that continues to fight for your rights.

I am honored to be your president-elect, and I'm looking forward to our next two years together.

Thanks,
Jody Curran

ELECTION RESULTS 2007

And the winners are . . .

President: Jody Curran (143 votes)
Vice-President: David Weinstein (141 votes)
Secretary: Susan Moreno (143 votes)
Treasurer: Henry Erelli (141 votes)
Uncountable ballots: 11

Congratulations to all who will begin their two-year term on July 1, 2007

The President's Hours for February

Grievances/Complaints - 62 hours
Negotiations - 33
Community Relations - 26
Internal Meetings - 14.5
Internal communications - 11.5
Work with MTA & NEA - 8.5
Other Meetings with Management - 6
Doing paperwork, staying organized - 3.5
Membership Work/Finances - 3
Organizing Members - 2.5
Health & Safety - 2.5
Benefits - 2
Professional Development - 2

This totals 177 hours for the 4 weeks starting Feb 5



BEU CALENDAR

Executive Board Meeting

Apr 2 BHS Room 250 2:45pm

Deadline for April Articles

Apr 3

Good Friday (No School)

Apr 6

Reps Council Meeting

Apr 9 BHS MLK Room 2:45pm

December Brookline Educator

Apr 12

Public Hearing on School Budget

Apr 12 Town Hall 7:00pm

April Break (No School)

Apr 16 thru 20

BEU Committee Meetings

Apr 23 various locales 3:00pm

BEU General Meeting

Apr 30 BHS Auditorium 3:00pm

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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