

BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

April 2007

ED POLICY LEGISLATION

We, as educators and union members, came together and worked to elect a pro-education governor. Our success was fueled by conversing with others. It sounds so simple, but it was extremely effective. Now it is time for our Legislators and Local Leaders, who talk about supporting public education, to act. Our members have the power to help change the direction of public education by continuing our conversations with neighbors, friends, family and extending the message to Legislators and Local Leaders.

Our message is clear: Educators are committed to helping students achieve. We have the expertise to drive education policy in the right direction. Legislators need to commit the resources to make it happen. We are fully aware of the budget shortfall Brookline faces this year and perhaps in years to come. The first battle we face is working to increase funding for Chapter 70 to reflect the needs of our student body.

This is simply our first order of business. We would like to establish and build an ongoing relationship with legislators to ensure that our voice is heard. I will be speaking at our next membership meeting and you can contact me or Phil at any time if you are interested in having a voice in education policy. Think about the positive changes we can make to determine that our children have a bright future.

If you'd like to help lead this effort, please contact Eowyn Daly via e-mail or at 617 610 7577.

CONTRACTS NOW AVAILABLE

Our three new contracts (Unit A, Unit B and the Para Unit) covering 2006 through 2009 have been completed. They are now being signed by our negotiators and then will be printed and distributed. In the meantime, you can find electronic copies in the BEU e-mail conference or on our website, brookline.massteacher.org.

Reminder...

BEU GENERAL MEETING Monday, April 30 at 3:00 in the BHS Auditorium

Proposed Agenda:

- AFL-CIO Affiliation
- Health Care Negotiations Update
- Update on School Budget
- Legislative Organizing Update
- Possible Vote to Suspend By-Laws allowing a retiree to be Treasurer
- Open Forum with President-Elect



ON RONNY SYDNEY

For another in a series of interviews of past BEU activists, we met recently with Ronny Sydney. Retired this winter as Director of Legislative Documents at the Massachusetts State House, Ronny has been a Brookline Selectman, a State Representative, and a lawyer as well as a teacher and BEA president. We asked her to talk about how teaching and union work fit into her life.

I grew up in Swampscott and when it was time to go off to college I wanted to go to Penn but my Dad said, "Go to UMass," and at that point in my life I tried to please my parents. In college I was sociology major and my father was very upset, he didn't think it was a likely career choice, and as I recall he told me, "You can be a secretary or a nurse or a teacher." I would have made anyone, to this day, a lousy secretary, and I would faint at the sight of somebody else's blood.

So I minored in education and when I graduated I got a job teaching in New York at a "have not" school. The only books we had in the [4th grade] classroom were third grade books and administrators said, "Oh it doesn't matter, they can't read anyway," it was that kind of an atmosphere. It was also 1961 and the year of the big teachers strike in New York, but it passed right by my school. I never even knew what a union was, much less that a strike was going on, I found out about it later.

After moving back to Massachusetts a few years later I was divorced and had a daughter to support so I started subbing in Brookline. I subbed in every school in Brookline and I loved it! One day I went to Runkle School to a fifth grade class and I had to take the kids to the swimming pool at the high school for their swimming tests. I lined up 25 kids and I brought them to the high school and they took their swim tests and I lined them up and I brought them back and that afternoon the principal called me into her office and asked "Would you like a permanent job?" because I got them all back safely. I taught 4th and 5th grade at Runkle for a while, and then I moved up to 7th and 8th grade, and then to the high school. I was the first teacher of the law program, the criminal justice program.

So, I became active in the union up at the high school. I was always interested in negotiations. I remember being at a union meeting and Arnie Marcus turned to me and said, "Why don't you become president?" I said I'd consider becoming an officer for a few years. I had no intention of becoming a union president - I had no inkling, I just fell into it; that's happened to me a lot, particularly

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Reminder!

Please save the afternoon of **Thursday, May 17th** as we honor Phil Katz for his extraordinary leadership over the past twelve years. Watch your mailbox for further details which will arrive soon.

JOB CREEP

OR: SO WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME NOT TO DO?



Do you ever feel as though no matter what you do, you can't get caught up? Or that what you are asked to do just keeps expanding? That if one more person asks you to do just one more thing that "won't take much time at all" you are going to scream? If so, welcome to the exciting world of Job Creep.

Job creep is a simple concept, really. Job creep is the phenomenon of small increases in job expectations that taken separately may not seem like much, but when added up start to greatly impact one's work. It means that the definition of your job keeps expanding : more subjects and/or concepts to teach, more duties, more phone calls and e-mail, less help with needy students which means you have to do more, fewer support staff, and the same amount of time to do it all in. As educators we are expected to do more, do it faster, do it to greater depth of understanding, and for all students all the time.

Some recent examples of job creep include:

- Going from notes from parents to notes, e-mail, and phone messages, and being told to respond to every one in a "timely fashion"
- Posting assignments on web sites as well as in the classroom
- Meetings during lunch and preps, despite the contract, because there is no other time
- Taking just one more professional development course, because it looks so good
- Duties during what used to be prep times
- More individualized instruction and modification, per IEPs, 504s, and differentiated instruction
- More meetings - before, after and during school
- Increasing expectation to keep "our" rooms clean as custodial staff is reduced
- More recommendations to write
- Movement from four report cards to four report cards and four full progress reports
- Loss of lifetime certification with the need for more and more professional development coupled with ever-changing and confusing licensure rules
- Increased specialist and SPED caseloads
- Additions to IEP requirements
- Annual initiatives in which participation is expected, with last year's still going on
- Increasing and more complex medical needs of students, such as food allergies

Something has to give, and unfortunately, sometimes it's you. Job creep affects every aspect of your life, if you let it. You can find yourself spending less time with your family and friends as you go in earlier, stay later, and work more on nights and weekends. You find yourself feeling increasingly stressed from doing too much in too short a time and isolated from having no chance to spend time with colleagues. Ultimately you may feel like a poor teacher by not meeting the impossible standard

of getting everything finished each day. Sounds miserable and familiar, doesn't it? So what can be done?

First, understand that this wonderful, demanding job of being a teacher has no beginning and no end. You are always in the middle of several things at once. So, stop expecting yourself to finish it all by the end of the day or week. There is ALWAYS something else you could do. Stop, say hi to your kids, go for a walk, have dinner with your spouse, stop being a teacher 24/7.

Second, when someone asks you to do that one more thing that you know there isn't time for, try saying. "Sure, I'd be glad to. What would you like me to stop doing so I have time to do it?" When you get a blank look, and the answer of "Nothing", calmly point out that your day is already full. Again, politely ask which of your tasks should be delayed or eliminated to make way for the new one. Of course this only works if the job creep is coming from the administration. It can also come from state and national regulations, student needs, parent requests, our own desire to serve students better than the system provides, help our colleagues, or other sources.

Third, stop feeling guilty. In education, job creep is almost always framed as something that is good for the students, making it very hard to say no to increasing demands. This can lead to you feeling like a poor teacher if you don't do everything possible. However, as stated above, the job has no ending. Stop beating yourself up about recognizing the need to take care of yourself and your family as well as your students.

Job creep is here. The grievance team hears about it regularly. Please, everyone, understand that if you are stressed, overtired, and don't take the time for your life outside school, you simply will not be on task and alert when you are with your students.



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)

RONNY SYDNEY
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with politics.

When I was BEA president we had a one-year term and only a little release time; we were only released from teaching one class. So we really had very little time to be effective at all, and we were almost merely figureheads. I was president during Proposition 2½ [the law that limits property tax increases without an override vote of the citizenry] and because of that, we met with all of the town unions. We found out a lot about each other and we started working together during Prop 2½ to get more funding. I learned a lot about politics, painfully.

It was a time of layoffs because there were huge cuts. They pink-slipped everybody who did not have tenure. The big issue at that time was seniority, and who would get bumped. There was a demonstration on Route 9 in front of the Lincoln School. They were protesting the loss of the crossing guard and so they were slowing down traffic on Route 9. Bev Johnson and I drove up to see if everything was all right. And Joe Riley was there and he said to me, "Pop your hood." I was right there in front of the school. A motorcycle cop came over to my window and he cited me for using my motor vehicle to obstruct traffic. The MTA assigned me a lawyer, and the press was all over me because I was the only one to get cited during 2 ½. The day I was supposed to be in court was the day I was supposed to give my criminal justice exam. A couple of my students asked if they could come with me to court. They ended up dropping the charges.

While I was teaching, I started negotiating contracts for the MTA and I became a part-timer for them. I would do small ancillary units at night so I could still teach during the day. I started working for the Mass Bar Association, putting lawyers and teachers together as partners and doing the Mock Trial so I had a little release time to do that. I began teaching less and less and then I left teaching and I went to law school so that I could negotiate labor contracts. My dream job was to become a full time MTA negotiator. But I sort of educated myself right out of that market when I went to law school.

My union work really propelled me to law school, because of the negotiating. I negotiate all the time, negotiating contracts, negotiating separation agreements, negotiating visitation agreements, it's constant. So my teaching years and my MTA experience really defined the rest of my life. I don't think I would have run for public office or done any of those things. The fact that I had gone to a national convention meant I knew all these political people so when I got to the state house I knew a lot of them.

Teaching changed my life, and then becoming active in the MTA took me on my political career and my legal career, so it really had a strong influence on my life. And it's only because I couldn't be a nurse or a secretary.

FRIEND OF EDUCATION

Nominations for the BEU Friend of Education will come out right after April Vacation. So it's not too soon to think of an individual or group that you think has gone above and beyond to support the children and/or schools in Brookline. The deadline for nominations will be May 2. If you have questions, call the BEU office at 617-277-0251.

Keeping In Touch With Your Health Insurance...

NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE:



As I write this article, negotiations about our health insurance for next year are continuing between the Coalition of the town unions (including the BEU). At present, the Coalition has offered to raise the co-pays, but not as much as the town wants. Our "package" offers the town and the schools significant savings. Coalition bargaining includes health benefits for retirees too. I also must mention that this coalition has worked very well. It feels good to see all our town unions working together.

Money Saving Tips:

First, I'm so glad that so many have mailed in your 2006 Fitness Club rebate forms this year. I meet staff in the hallway who are pleased they did this for the very first time. I hope you don't have too many problems deciding how to spend the \$150. If you do, I'd be glad to help. Remember, May 1st is a good date to send in your 2007 rebate form. The form can be downloaded on www.cbbs.ma.com.

Another suggestion, one that I use - Express Scripts: get three months of medicine for the price of one. (Now \$10 for name brand; \$5 for generic). It is very good for any long term medicine that you use. You must get a prescription for 90 days, with three renewals, and mail it to them with a form (I have some and the 3rd floor of Town Hall has some). My medicine seems to arrive within a week. You may renew over the telephone, available 7 days a week, 24 hours daily. I am very satisfied with the service, and I like to save the money.

Keep your fingers crossed for good news about health care bargaining.

-Elly Finkel, Health Care Chair

DISABILITY INSURANCE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Even if you missed our Enrollment Counselors when they came to your school, you can still sign up for our Disability Insurance. Call 888-636-0112 extension 200. The Disability Enrollment Period ends on May 11, so sign up now.

Hold the date...

**MONDAY, JUNE 4
FOR THE BEU RETIREMENT PARTY**



To honor our retiring members and our Friend of Education. This is always a great affair and one not to miss.

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

SHIFT INTO AUTOMATIC INVESTING



After a BEU financial workshop this past fall, one of my colleagues approached me and handed over the list of town sanctioned 403b vendors. "Which one do you recommend?" I quickly scanned the list of over 30 vendors, paused and reluctantly arrived at a frustrating conclusion. Selecting a good 403b provider represents only the tip of the planning iceberg. The next step involves the infinitely more complex task of selecting a diversified portfolio of mutual funds and then annually monitoring and rebalancing the funds. How can you realistically expect your typical educator, bereft of financial guidance, to make these difficult investment decisions?

Is there a viable solution or an alternative to this inherently flawed and befuddled 403b Retirement Savings Program? Absolutely! In the private sector, a recent retirement innovation involves a one-stop, automatic investment program offered by thousands of companies. It's a straightforward, money saving investment vehicle that provides a balanced, diversified portfolio and customizes for the individual investor at a fraction of the cost of the current 403b programs.

What might an automatic 403b investment program look like for educators? First of all, you would be automatically enrolled in the program at a set percentage of 3-5% of annual salary. This money would be channeled into a prescribed and prudent set of quality mutual fund investments with a reputable company like Vanguard or Fidelity. Individuals would have the option to increase or decrease the level of contributions or for that matter opt out of the program. Companies have seen a dramatic increase in investor participation when inertia and confusion are removed from the investment equation.

Does one size fit all? One critical component of the automatic retirement program involves the "Life Cycle Funds" or "Target Date Funds." These funds customize the investment mix and gradually adjust the combination of funds to reflect an investor's age and risk tolerance. For example, a 25 year old teacher, with a retirement target date of 2041, might begin with a more aggressive portfolio dominated by stock mutual funds, perhaps 90%, and only 10% in bonds. Over the next 35 years, the mix of stocks and bonds would annually rebalance and the mix adjusted to represent a less aggressive investment approach, possibly 60% stocks and 40% bonds by retirement age 60. In short, your portfolio automatically gets safer as you get older.

The 403b retirement program with its dizzying array of investment choices and predatory insurance companies is tragically flawed. At the end of the day, the majority of teachers are either overwhelmed with choices leading to low participation or victimized by insurance companies who charge excessive fees and dispense mediocre advice. The real tragedy, however, is that too many teachers retire without the resources required to supplement their pensions, offset the effects of inflation and enjoy a financially secure retirement.

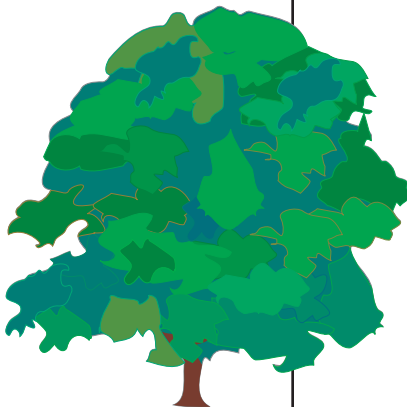
**Next month's article will focus on a successful, viable alternative, the Wisconsin Teachers' progressive 403b program.*

-Robert Miller, Devotion

The President's Hours for March 2007

Grievances/Complaints - 79.5 hours
Negotiations - 38
Other Meetings with Management - 15.5
Doing paperwork, staying organized - 13.5
Internal communications - 13
Organizing Members - 11.5
Internal Meetings - 8.5
Work with MTA & NEA - 5
Membership Work/Finances - 4.5
Community Relations - 4.5
Benefits - 4
Health & Safety - 4
Professional Development - 3

This totals 204.5 hours for the 4 weeks starting March 5.



BEU CALENDAR

BEU General Meeting

Apr 30 BHS MLK Room 3:00pm

Friend of Education Nominations

May 2

Executive Board Meeting

May 7 BHS Room 250 2:45pm

Deadline for May Articles

May 8

MTA Annual Meeting

May 11&12 Boston All Day

Reps Council Meeting

May 14 BHS Room 385A 2:45pm

May Brookline Educator

May 16

Party for Outgoing President

May 17 Blackburn house 3:00

BEU Committee Meetings

May 21 various locales 3:00pm

Memorial Day (No School)

May 28

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

This issue went to press on April 6