

# BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

June 2007

*From the President's Desk...*

## THANK YOU

In 1994, we had a bruising contract battle with the School Committee and Board of Selectmen that mainly focused on health care. They had unilaterally started to take a higher premium percentage from our paycheck. We filed charges. We won. They were going to appeal. We were planning to go on strike. At the last hour, we settled and over the next 5 years, the School Committee paid out one million dollars to settle. I was Vice President of the union and chair of the "Crisis Committee" - I was the lead organizer in job actions. That was quite a year.

I was bit by the union bug, just as ten years earlier I was bit by the teaching bug. Both careers are full of passion, frustration and immense rewards. I've always missed teaching, but I have enjoyed doing the union work so much, that it was fine. I love being an advocate, fighting for the underdog and improving public education.

So, in 1995, with the support of many members, I decided to run for President. My platform was headed with the desire to organize the Paraprofessionals. This had been a simmering issue, and the fact that they could not be part of the health care settlement brought it to a head. In addition, aides doing the same work were being paid vastly different amounts; some were getting health care and sick time, and some not. It was a mess and very unfair. Within two years we had organized, signed cards, had a representation election and negotiated their first contract.

The union has not only grown in size of the last decade, but grown in strength. About 10% of our membership is regularly involved in union activism. Whether it is stuffing mailboxes, being a Building Rep or Executive Board member, grievance team member or negotiator, people are constantly stepping forward to help their colleagues and their profession - to pull their weight.

It has been a pleasure to work with dozens of negotiating teams, whether it has been in one of the four sets of contract negotiations, or the countless interim negotiations. The BEU is almost always able to pull together a diverse, representative group to advocate for our cause and bring in fair contracts.

Likewise, I have enjoyed working with our grievance committee - a group of activists I could count on to represent our members when they most need it. With an unending sense of justice, our grievance reps ensure that we are all treated fairly and that our contract maintains its integrity.

It is fitting that I now leave the presidency of the BEU by settling the same issue that brought me in - health insurance benefits. I am proud to have been able to work with leaders of the BEU and every other union in Brookline to maintain a good benefits structure, start a dental plan and, most importantly, protect our retirees' insurance.

When I started this job, many people questioned my sanity, saying it was difficult, lonely and thankless. Nothing could be further

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*From the Desk of the President Elect...*

## LOOKING FORWARD

This spring, Phil and I have spent a lot of time just talking, poring over emails and attending union conferences and training events together. I know I've benefitted by his expertise, but I still have a long way to go. However, I'm looking forward to serving you in my official role as BEU president which begins on July 1, 2007. This summer I'll be working in the BEU office (basement of the high school, under the copy center), finding my way around our physical and electronic files and preparing for my opening day speech for the 2007-2008 school year. Oh yes, I'll also be sending my oldest daughter off to college. Whew!

Well, I have a few things on my mind. First, we seem to have the budget cuts behind us for this year. My heartfelt wishes for a happy future go out to those whose contracts were reduced or not renewed. I know this was difficult for you and I hope there will be something positive for you in this change. The rest of us can respect the gaps left by your absences by not rushing to take on your vacated tasks in addition to our own.

As I write this, I know that there are other local teacher unions struggling with difficult negotiations. For example, the educators in Quincy have been working all this year without a contract and, in fact, are now on strike. A group of BEU members went to Quincy last week to help up with informational pickets; the involvement and energy of the Quincy educators was high. We should continue to offer solidarity and help to Quincy and other locals like them. Giving our support to other teachers is a great way to build respect for our profession as well as strengthen our own morale and those of our fellow teachers. Stay tuned for more about this...

Finally, we'll be meeting next week to vote on a new health care package that has been negotiated between the town and a coalition of town unions including the BEU, the firefighters, the police, the secretaries, the engineers and the public works AFSCME members. While we're never happy to pay even a little more for health care (this plan has some higher copays), the great advantage of this plan lies in allowing us to represent and protect our retirees as well as securing some premium savings for us and the town. I urge you to inform yourself by reading about it on the BEU conference; then, come to our ratification meeting on June 18th.

I'm looking forward to working with and for you in the months and years ahead. Thanks, and I hope you all have a great summer.

*-Jody Curran*

*Reminder...*

**HEALTH CARE RATIFICATION MEETING**  
**MONDAY, JUNE 18, 2:45**  
**BHS AUDITORIUM**  
**VOTING IS EXTENDED UNTIL 5:15**



## HAVE YOU BEEN ASKED TO WORK IN THE SUMMER?

If you have, then you should know the following. There are three different ways, and payment methods to work for the Brookline Public Schools during the summer:

1. As a volunteer, i.e. unpaid
2. As part of a curriculum workshop or some professional development opportunities, the workshop rate of \$28.00 per hour for those in Units A and B, with workshop leaders receiving 33.00 per hour. The administration is paying Paras \$10.64 per hour, which is way too low - but at least is not mandatory.
3. At your regular daily rate (often called "per diem")
  - for those in Unit A your annual salary divided by 182, then divided by 6.
  - for those in Unit B, your daily rate divided by 6.
  - for those in the Para Unit, your hourly rate is listed in the Appendix A of the Para Unit contract.

You are not required to work in either of the first two cases for any reason. If you don't want to work, you can't be forced to unless they pay you per diem. (Paras cannot be forced to work under any of the 3 conditions above.)

If you are feeling pressured to work without the pay of your daily rate (per diem) or you have any questions at all, please contact a grievance team member or call the BEU office at 617-277-0251 for a consultation. Remember, you are not alone - we can help you by explaining your options, detailing your rights and responsibilities in your situation, suggesting how to handle the requests and, if needed, getting directly involved in advocating for you.

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)



## HISTORIC AGREEMENT

As we come to the end of the school year, your Health Care Bargaining Team has brought to you a historic agreement to protect the health care of retirees. This has happened after months of negotiations by the Brookline Public Employee Coalition (which includes BEU, AFSCME, Firefighters, Police, Educational Secretarial Assoc., Engineering, Teamsters, and retirees). Some of the changes in our current contract involve our right to bargain together, get dental insurance which is paid by us through a payroll deduction (this makes it a pre-tax expense), and get a bonus for getting health insurance elsewhere. In return, we have agreed to higher co-pays (which run about the same as other towns) and lower the new premiums that we are paying, both for our members and the Town.

The next step is that our members must ratify this agreement. I highly recommend that all members attend the ratification vote on June 18 and vote in favor of ratification. I recommend you carefully read the information distributed in the recent health care bulletin and on the BEU conference.

This agreement would go into effect on October 1, 2007. During September, there will be some information sessions (maybe a health fair day) and an enrollment period (usually about a week). You can find the full agreement on line at <http://brookline.massteacher.org/healthcare.html>.

Now, to end this column, and school year, I must say some of my usual comments:

If you haven't send in your rebate form for health club membership or Weight Watchers or other hospital based weight program membership, do it NOW. It's too easy to forget once you're busy with school. Remember \$150 can pay for a night at some motel overlooking the water at your favorite place, or a dinner at the Four Seasons. I could go on and on. I keep reminding you because I know that some people do not get the rebate that they should.

I wish you all a healthy and happy summer. Enjoy! For the new retirees, good luck-it's fun.

I look forward to working on the health committee this coming year with a new BEU President. I will miss working with Phil Katz after all these years. He did leave us with a new health insurance contract and a Public Employee contract, which we've wanted for a long time. I wish him all the luck in the world (he deserves it)-health, wealth, and happiness and everything else. I hope that wherever he goes, they appreciate how great he is.

-Elly Finkle, Health Care Chair



## THANKS TO THOSE WHO BRING THE NEWS

How do these newsletters, and bulletins and other mailings from the BEU get in your mailboxes? There is someone at each building who stuffs the mailboxes in their buildings every week or so (sometimes up to 4 times in a week!). They are: Jen Douglas, Baker; Scott Butchart, BHS; Kerry Loughman, Devotion; Amy Neale, Driscoll; Debbie Fay, Heath; Peggy Williams, Lawrence; Kathy Tower, Lincoln; Pat Vonnegut, Lynch; Norma Steinberg, Pierce; Laura Vish, Runkle; Mary Matthews, Sperber; Susan Goodman, Town Hall. We'd also like to give a huge thanks to Laurie Sheffield who helps proofread the newsletters. Thank you all!

- Philip Katz and Amie Buchman

In our second election of the year, all of the of the nominees were elected as follows: **BEU Secretary**, Joanna Lampert

### Delegates to the MTA Annual Meeting:

Deborah Allen	Karen Blackburn
Jody Curran	Rich Goldberg
Michelle Gorden	Philip Katz
Susan Moreno	Ann Collins
Amie Buchman	Barry David
Ben Schwartz	Robert Miller
John Abramson	Elisabeth Pendery
Eowyn Daly	Nicole Disher

### Delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly:

Amie Buchman

**Congratulations to all!**

## MTA ANNUAL MEETING

Brookline was represented at the MTA Annual meeting on May 11 and 12 by both new and returning delegates from our schools. As usual there were a combination of events, celebrations and business discussions both on budgetary and practical proposals, and matters of principle. We asked some of the delegates to share their thoughts on the meeting.

Deb Allen was delighted that the MTA representative assembly finally passed a resolution condemning the war in Iraq. Jody Curran was excited to hear the remarks by Massachusetts Teacher of the Year recipient, Jessie Auger, about her experiences in El Salvador and her thoughts about students needing to be at the center of all discussions and policy decisions about education. Jody noted that there was also lively discussion on other matters of how the MTA can continue to both grow and strengthen as a union and be a voice in the arena of public policy. She was pleased that the delegates overwhelmingly voted for "the MTA to provide information to all of its affiliates about...joining central labor councils." "We need to reach out to other unions in our community and our state to solidify the strength of our unified voice," said Jody.

Susan Moreno noted that it was great to see the organization take such a strong and unified stance against the war. Delegates also supported strengthening existing resolutions promoting healthy and safe schools, recognizing diversity in the curriculum and calling for a stronger commitment to fund public education.

Ben Schwartz was very excited about the number of social justice issues positively addressed – support for other communities worldwide and the consideration of a more environmentally friendly electronic approach to MTA newsletters. He reported very positive feedback toward paras and other support personnel.

Richard Goldberg almost got to speak; it was the second year in a row that he almost got to talk against the War in Iraq. The MTA voted in favor of the withdrawal with not a single member rising to speak against the measure. This was almost the same measure that was defeated last year. This is a great victory for the folks in the Peace and Justice Caucus who have worked so hard on this issue. It was also wonderful to hear the speech from the teacher of the year about the great work done in the Cambridge-El Salvador project she told us about.

Phil Katz, in his last year of attendance as the BEU President, was pleased that so many BEU delegates attended (we filled 16 of our allotted 18 seats) and was glad to see how many were active in the discussions. As a founding member of the Peace and Justice Caucus, he was extremely pleased that MTA took a stand against the war and occupation in Iraq as well as taking a stand against excessive military recruitment in our schools. He was also happy that MTA is putting ever more resources into grassroots organizing in order to make MTA and its affiliates even stronger voices for members. Also representing the BEU were Karen Blackburn, Barry David, Ann Collins, Amie Buchman, Robert Miller, and Elisabeth Pendery.

This was Nicole Disher's second year attending the Annual Meeting and what brought her back was the energy, excitement, insight and dedication that all of the delegates bring to the room. It's great place to be for an educator. Please consider running to join us next spring.

## MAKING MOTIONS

This was the fourth or fifth MTA annual meeting that I have attended and I have supported several progressive stands in the past. I was pleased to see that the motion against continued participation in the Iraq war sailed through so easily. Clearly the tone in the country has changed. I was also pleased to see that the question of military recruiters on high school campuses was dealt with so seriously.

This spring I also put in a motion to try to put the MTA on record against arbitrary raids on workplaces where many immigrant workers work. My main goal was to stop the separation and neglect of families and children, which should be a high priority for a teachers' organization. My motivation was the raid and round up of mostly Central American women recently in New Bedford. Ironically, these mostly Guatemalan Indigenous women were sewing "protective leather vests" for U.S. troops in Iraq. Many of these workers were sent to holding facilities in Texas and Florida and their children were left without parental support.

Unfortunately, the MTA voted down my motion by approximately a 60/40 margin. Clearly, scapegoating undocumented immigrants continues to be an easy way to impose certain views on the U.S. population. Last year the MTA approved a motion I made to support the sons and daughters of illegal immigrants who were being denied in-state status in Mass. colleges and universities so that they would be able to attend like all other state high school graduates. Hopefully, by next year the atmosphere around their parents will have changed, too.

*-Barry David, BHS*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT...

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from the truth (though, questioning my sanity is always a good idea). I have always been supported, I have never felt alone, and never does a day go by when I am not thanked by someone. This is a great union, made great by its members and leaders.

I leave the BEU in the exceptionally good hands of Jody Curran. I have been working with Jody for five years as a grievance chair and I've seen her passion, her conviction and her intelligence at work. Please give her some time to get acclimated to this job and learn the ropes. She will start out very well and will grow into a great leader who can take the BEU to new heights.

I would like to very much thank the BEU leaders and members, past and present, for such a wonderful opportunity to serve. Through my service to our members, I have been able to serve our students and all of public education - as I have always felt that a strong union makes a better school system. A union that can stand for its members creates members that can stand for their students. Our working conditions are our students learning conditions, and their is nothing more important in our society than excellent public education.

*- Phil Katz*

### **A snapshot of the President's work in twelve years:**

Number of hours on e-mail	7755
Net increase in number of members (not incl retirees)	266
Newsletters published	112
Number of maternity leaves counseled	205
Number of School Committee meeting attended	228
Number of Superintendents worked with	4
Number of contract agreements signed	67
Pairs of shoes worn through	6
Number of daughters born	2
Percent of hair loss	40
Number of pounds gained	22

## FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS WHO CAN TEACHERS TRUST?

In 2004 our NEA, the largest teachers' union in the land, accepted millions of dollars in fees from the sale of 403(b) annuities promoted in the NEA publication. In 2005 the New York State Teachers' Union received over 3 million dollars from ING, a Dutch financial company that advertises 403(b) annuities in the union publication. In 2007 the quid pro quo of union publications providing advertising space to 403 (b) providers in exchange for a fee has become standard practice from Pennsylvania to California. In fact, I was only able to identify one Teachers' Union, the Wisconsin Educators Association (WEA), not receiving a fee from a financial company in exchange for advertising space—an arrangement which most teachers view as a tacit endorsement.

Now you might ask what's wrong with unions generating fees from selling advertising space. After all, for most publications advertising remains their lifeblood. The problems surface within the ethical context of transparency. When you read an advertisement in a publication, readers automatically recognize that the advertisements for a BVLGARI watch or a Blackberry are paid promotional materials and not the magazine's product endorsement. The problem with advertisements from companies like ING, MET and Horace Mann in union publications revolves around pretense and disclosure. Since union publications prominently feature only one 403(b) provider, most teachers interpret this as an endorsement. Unbeknownst to teachers, the unions' only criteria for selecting product advertisements from 403(b) providers is the fee.

The unions' conspicuous absence of oversight has left many teachers in an untenable situation with their 403(b) contracts. Teachers naively assumed that the union had conducted "financial due diligence" for those products prominently displayed in union publications. They made an understandable leap of faith that union representatives would have carefully examined the products before applying the union stamp of approval. Now, after years of mediocre performance and high fees, disgruntled teachers attempting to terminate their ING, MET, or Horace Mann 403(b) contracts have made a shocking discovery embedded in the 403(b) contract. They must pay an exit fee or "surrender charge," typically as much as 10% of assets or wait 7-10 years for the contract expiration.

And then, of course, there's Wisconsin (WEA) where teachers have established an exemplary 403(b) program. After recognizing that the combination of unions selling endorsements and insurance companies selling financial products rarely benefits teachers, they formed an independent 403(b) programs that provides an impressive range of financial products with low fees. This program also offers the advice of six registered investment advisers whose sole purpose involves providing teachers with prudent and impartial financial

The MTA need not reinvent the wheel when it comes to providing a viable and attractive alternative to our state's current chaotic 403(b) program. The WEA Trust has established an enviable financial program for Wisconsin 403(b) participants. I encourage you to visit their website, [http://www.weatrust.com/wea/weamain.nsf/vw\\_pb\\_d/retirementidx](http://www.weatrust.com/wea/weamain.nsf/vw_pb_d/retirementidx), and click on Investment Choices. This is the type of program Massachusetts teachers deserve!

*-Robert Miller, Devotion*



## BEU CALENDAR

<b>Health Care Ratification Mtg</b>	<b>Jun 18</b>	<b>BHS Auditorium</b>	<b>2:45 pm</b>
<b>Last Day of Schol</b>	<b>June 20</b>		<b>12:00pm</b>
<b>First Day for Teachers</b>	<b>Sept 4</b>		
<b>First Day for Students</b>	<b>Sept 6</b>		
<b>Executive Board Meeting</b>	<b>Sep 10</b>	<b>BHS Room 240</b>	<b>2:45pm</b>
<b>Reps Council Meeting</b>	<b>Sep 17</b>	<b>BHS MLK Roon</b>	<b>2:45pm</b>
<b>BEU Committee Meetings</b>	<b>Sep 24</b>	<b>various locales</b>	<b>3:00pm</b>
<b>BEU Welcome Party</b>	<b>Oct 19</b>	<b>TBD</b>	<b>3:00pm</b>

*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:

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 6/8/07

### **The President's Hours for May**

Grievances/Complaints - 76.5 hours  
Negotiations - 46.5  
Work with MTA & NEA - 34.5  
Organizing Members - 21.5  
Internal communications - 15.5  
Internal Meetings - 15.5  
Membership Work/Finances - 14  
Doing paperwork, staying organized - 6  
Community Relations - 4.5  
Other Meetings with Management - 4  
Health & Safety - 3.5  
Professional Development - 3.5  
Benefits -1

**This totals 246.5 hours for the 5 weeks starting April 30**

