

BEU *The Brookline Educator*

Newsletter of the Brookline Educators Union

December 2007

INTRODUCING ASHLEY ADAMS

Hello BEU members. I'm the new Uniserv representative from the Massachusetts Teachers Association. I replaced Dorine Levasseur at the end of the summer when we traded some of our assignments. I've been asked to give you a little background about myself. Being the garrulous sort, I'm happy to comply.

I've been working for the MTA for about eight years. I've represented, organized, negotiated, trained, and advocated for teachers in many cities and towns in this state, including Canton, Arlington, Revere, Randolph, and Hull, as well as many places in central Massachusetts when I first started with the MTA in 2000.

I've been a union organizer and representative of one type or another since 1983, when I started out organizing clothing and textile workers in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. I moved on to the health care industry, organizing nursing assistants and the like in the mountains of Pennsylvania and, later, all across Massachusetts. I had a four year stint as the broadcast director of AFTRA, getting to know and represent television and radio broadcasters in New England. I left there to join the teachers nearly eight years ago.

I love my work (most of the time at least) and I enjoy a good fight. My philosophy is that the best I can do for Brookline educators is to help them acquire the skills to stand up for themselves and the students they teach, as a well organized, powerful group. In my view, a teacher's working conditions are the student's learning conditions. So when we win - education wins. Toward that end I believe that a union needs to create a culture of winning, winning battles that address the many interests and values that our educators share.

I look forward to contributing a column from time to time that addresses, among other subjects, the following topics: job protection for the non-professional status teacher, effective one-on-one communication at work, winning labor disputes without filing grievances, how arbitration works (and doesn't work), and preparing members for an effective contract campaign. If you have any other subjects that you'd like to see me address, please let me know.

-Ashley Adams, MTA FieldRep

PARAS: JOIN UP!

Too many paras have put off joining the BEU. The reason most often given for this is money. Everyone knows that paras are the lowest paid educators in the Brookline school system. The truth is, paras would be paid even lower wages if it weren't for the union. The union has continually gone to bat for the paras. It only makes sense to support the one organization that promises to stand by you and advocate for your interests. Union dues can be hard to squeeze out, but the cost of not joining could be far worse.

For over ten years the union has worked endlessly to increase wages and benefits for our paraprofessional staff. There was a time when there was no contract at all, no paid sick or personal days, no sick bank, or job security. Wages were far lower. Things didn't improve because one day the School Committee realized paras deserved more. The change came from union members negotiating for many long hours to extract more money and benefits from the Town. It has been a long battle.

The BEU has no intention of stopping here. You deserve more. We plan to continue making progress in getting better wages and benefits, but we must have a membership who supports this effort. More paras need to be part of this. BEU membership for paras costs less than \$1.00/day. The wage and benefit increases that have been gained over the years more than cover the cost of membership. And with membership comes a number of discounts on things like auto insurance and home heating oil that, once again, can cover the cost of membership.

A good reason for joining the BEU is to start paying for what you're already receiving. The BEU has operating expenses that your dues help cover. Without support, the union has less strength to advocate for you. If you haven't joined already, please do so by the December 15, 2007 deadline. Contact your school or department representative, Jody Curran, or myself.

-Karen Blackburn, Devotion

SUBSTITUTE UPDATE

Thanks to Andrea and Chris, our intrepid substitute personnel, Fred Lown, the BEU substitute point person, the BEU membership and open communication with the Superintendent, there is some good news on the substitute front. The Northeastern Co-op Aide positions are being restored, according to Bill Lupini. Although no exact date has been given, the target date is sometime around the January return to school.

On a related note, be sure to call in for a substitute as soon as

you know you will be out if it is a planned absence. If you wake up sick, try to call in by 6:30 AM. This makes it possible for Andrea and Chris to plan the substitute needs for the entire district.

And finally, keep sending your emails to Fred Lown (this is better than the BEU conference). It will be important to have documentation from both before and after the Northeastern Co-op students return.



EVALUATION TIMELINES

If this is an evaluation year for you, it is important that you know the following dates. Please note that under a new contract, teachers who have worked more than three years are treated as if they have Professional Teacher Status regardless of their licensure status.

Teachers without Professional Teacher Status

(Evaluated EVERY year)

Oct. 15: By this date you should have met with your supervisor to discuss goals for the year, your strengths and the support available.

The next three dates are suggestions from Human Resources to evaluators so that the progress reports are evenly spread out:

Oct. 27: You should receive your first staff progress report.

Dec. 2: You should receive your second staff progress report.

Jan. 31: You should receive your third staff progress report.

Feb. 15: Your Annual Report of Teacher Effectiveness is due by this date at the latest. This is not a suggested date, but is a contractually agreed deadline.

Teachers with Professional Teacher Status

(Evaluated every OTHER year)

Dec. 1: By this date, you should have met with your supervisor to discuss your goals for the year, your strengths, and the support available.

May 1: Your Annual Report of Teacher Effectiveness is due by this date at the latest.

Typically, teachers with professional teacher status receive one formal observation in the year of their evaluation.

PLEASE NOTE: An employee and his/her supervisor are expected to confer within 7 days of each classroom observation to discuss the lesson observed. A classroom observation report shall be completed at or after the post-observation conference. A copy of the completed observation form, signed by the teacher and the supervisor, will be given to the teacher.

It is not a common occurrence, but what if you have PTS, are due to be evaluated, and you don't get an evaluation for that year? If it is clear that one is not forthcoming, then by all means ask for one. It is important that you have documentation of the great job that you are doing.

If you are a teacher without Professional Teacher Status and your contract is not going to be renewed, you must be notified by April 15th. If you have professional teacher status, you must be notified by May 15. A non-renewal notice should not be a surprise to you. Your evaluator should have already discussed it with you.

Reinstatements rescinding such non-renewals will be made in writing. If you have professional teacher status and receive a non-renewal notice, please consider contacting the BEU right away.

If you think that your evaluation, or the process of creating your evaluation, is flawed, or if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to immediately contact the BEU at 617-277-0251. One of the following grievance committee members will get back in touch with you. All conversations are completely confidential.

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|------------------------|--------------------------|
| John Abramson (Unit B) | Sara Marx (Pierce) |
| Deb Allen (Devotion) | Bonnie Michal (Devotion) |
| Gerri Belle (Runkle) | Susan Moreno (BHS) |
| Chari Dalsheim (Heath) | Jill Sifantus (BHS) |
| Sandy Downes (Retired) | Susan Stark (BHS) |
| Robert Grant (BHS) | David Weinstein (Pierce) |
| Steve Lantos (BHS) | |

403B HOW AND WHY

About two dozen new and newish teachers attended a BEU sponsored workshop given by Bob Miller of Devotion school in mid-November. We learned how and why to add a 403b plan to our retirement plans. Bob is passionate about helping teachers to prepare for better retirements and is articulate and knowledgeable about financial planning, an area he became interested in 15 years ago. He has devoted himself to studying 403b's in particular for the last 10 years.

It was a focused, helpful and pretty painless introduction to a subject that many of us fail to address as well or as soon as we should. He gave us some history and background on both traditional pensions and 403b funds and provided plenty of stirring persuasion and solid numbers to back it up. He strongly recommended that many of us might best be served by investing in a "target date" fund, a choice that he has written about before in his monthly column in

this newsletter. See page four in this issue for additional information on this very topic.

Bob provided everything that his audience might need, applications for 3 major providers, lots of time and patience for beginner's questions, and even one on one consulting for issues, concerns and help to fill out the forms. He was thorough and to the point and even funny at times. The audience seemed enthusiastic and appreciative of the information. If you have questions or concerns about your existing retirement plans or current 403b be sure to come to the next BEU financial workshop, later this year, time and place TBA.

*Disclaimer. I have no financial ties to Bob Miller and receive no payment for promoting his workshop. Well...I do get some free advice from him, but so can you, at his next workshop.

-Amie Buchman, Pierce

Keeping In Touch With Your Health Insurance...

YEAR END

As the year comes to an end (where has the time gone?), we can think about what we have succeeded at this year in the health benefit department.

We now have dental insurance available to us. Retirees are guaranteed health insurance at the same percentage cost as the active personnel. At some time, this will be a plus for all of us. Rates have not gone up this year (though co-payments have). Reimbursements from the Town cover hospital out-patient co-pays.

We still have more to do; negotiations are going on about the opt-out provisions. We will keep you informed of the progress.

For next year, Blue Cross and the Town are looking into Wellness Programs as a hopeful way of containing costs. The exercise program, Minutes in Motion, held this year, was very successful with about 350 members participating.

Blue Cross Blue Shield is already mentioning a likelihood of a significant increase in costs for health insurance for next year. They haven't come out with hard numbers yet; however, both our committee and the town wish to keep the increase as low as possible, and will work hard to do so.

I have gotten many requests for forms for fitness club rebates. I have sent them out to all members who have asked for them. Now be certain to send them in. I now have a copy on my computer that I can e-mail to you if you wish. Let me know on my e-mail: "elly finkel". I feel very strongly that our members should get every rebate available to them, as it helps relieve the cost of medical insurance.

I want to wish you Happy Holidays, and may 2008 be a wonderful year.

-Elly Finkel, Health Advisory Committee

GET INVOLVED

BEU Universal Health Care Educational Forum in April

On Wed., April 2, the BEU will host a public educational forum on universal health care at 7:00 PM at Hunneman Hall at the Brookline Public Library on Washington St. (next to Town Hall and the Pierce School). This will be a panel discussion with local, state and national figures speaking on how to insure the uninsured, single-payer health care (the Canadian, British, French, etc. models) and other ideas on providing health care to all people at affordable rates. Many of you have seen Michael Moore's "Sicko" which indicts the health insurance companies. We at the BEU have struggled to have adequate health care for our members and of course we are interested in health care for all. We have worked with the other town unions and we want to reach out to them to attend and possibly co-sponsor this forum.

This is an important issue for all union members and for all citizens of Massachusetts and the U.S. On a local level, we continue to be faced with our insurance provider, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, regularly raising our rates, so this issue concerns us directly. If you want to get involved in helping to organize and publicize this event please contact: Barry David at Barry_David@brookline.k12.ma.us or call me directly at: (617)522-1909.

(Note: We already have a core of activists, but the more the merrier. We should schedule a meeting soon. Send me your ideas.)

-Barry David, BHS



GPO/WEP UPDATE

HOW IT AFFECTS YOU AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

Have you worked in another field before working in the school system? Do you think some day you might switch to another profession besides teaching or working in the schools? Does your spouse pay into social security? Then this affects you!

GPO – (Government Pension Offset) Reduces the amount of Social Security benefits paid to a spouse or survivor by 2/3 of the survivor's public pension.

WEP – (Windfall Elimination Provision) Reduces earned Social Security benefits of someone who also receives a public pension from a job (such as teachers, firefighters, police officers, postal workers) not covered by Social Security.

The Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82/S.206) is trying to repeal the GPO and WEP. On Nov. 6th the Senate subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions and Family Policy which is chaired by Senator Kerry heard testimony about the devastating affect of these measures on many public employees including teachers such as Peggy Kane, a retired English teacher from Medford. She taught for 35 years and testified to the loss of her deceased husband's entire social security benefits which had accrued as he worked for 30+ years. The MTA, which collected over 50,000 petitions, presented half of them at this hearing. The other half will be presented to the House Ways and Means Committee who will be hearing this issue next spring.

This issue has been the subject of five Congressional hearings in the past four years but has not managed to reach the Senate floor for a vote! There is opposition to this due to the cost of repealing these 2 provisions (approximately 80 billion over a 10 year period), but support has been growing. H.B. 82 currently has 330 co-sponsors, and S.B. 206 has 34 co-sponsors.

What can you do?

1. Continue to collect signatures on this issue from anyone who is a registered voter in Massachusetts. These signatures will be presented to the House Ways and Means Committee hearings in the spring. Petitions are being collected until January 1st 2008. Download the petition at [<http://www.massteacher.org/news/headlines/sspetition.pdf>] <http://www.massteacher.org/news/headlines/sspetition.pdf> and send completed petitions to: Paul F. Toner
Massachusetts Teacher Association
20 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108
2. Contact Senator Kerry thanking him for holding the hearing and supporting us. Ask him to have the Senate Finance committee release the Social Security Fairness Act of 2007 (Senate Bill 206) favorably and to move it quickly to the full Senate for a vote.
3. Elly Finkel is collecting signatures on behalf of retirees. Anyone who is retired and would like to help with this effort may contact her via Brookline email.

Note: Information for this article was taken from the MTA website, MTA Advantage newspaper, Donnie McGee, MCCC Vice President, and Stephen Bar of the Washington Post.

-Charlotte Craig, Lynch Center

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS AN INVESTMENT "BULL'S EYE"



Ready! Aim! Fire! You must be close to the frustration point when it comes to advice about enrolling in the 403(b)7, and my clip is just about empty. It's time to take careful and calculated aim with your 403(b)7 and direct your investment towards a "Target Date Fund."

"Target Date Funds" provide a low-fee, reliable, passive investment option for those educators either unwilling or unable to manage a mutual fund portfolio in their 403(b)7. Participants simply select a fund that coincides with their projected retirement date. These low-maintenance fund options are available in five year intervals beginning with 2010 for an educator with an imminent retirement date, all the way to 2045, for today's beginning, twenty-two year old teacher.

For example, a thirty-year-old teacher has a target date fund of 2035, assuming a retirement date of around age 60. For the first 25 years, the fund for such an investor operates with a more aggressive, diversified portfolio, comprised mostly of stocks. In the final five years, as the projected retirement date draws closer, the fund managers gradually adjust the asset allocation and temper the level of risk by increasing the fund's exposure to less risky asset classes like bonds and cash.

Vanguard 2035 (VTTHX): When it comes to outstanding mutual fund companies, Vanguard is truly positioned as the advanced guard protecting investors' best interests. This fund boasts a stellar four-year track record, an exceptionally low maintenance fee (.21%), an experienced manager, and extended exposure to all the major asset classes.

T. Rowe Price 2035 (TRRFX): Morningstar, the independent mutual fund rating service, refers to T. Rowe Price Retirement 2035 as a "compelling package." Led by the seasoned and successful money manager, Jerome Clark, this fund has posted exceptional gains since its inception in 2004, averaging 15.25% per annum. The fund exemplifies one-stop-shopping; an investor can obtain a balanced, diversified portfolio for a reasonable fee.

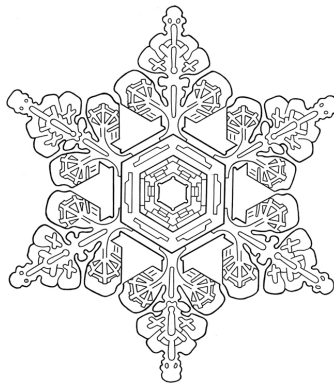
Fidelity Freedom 2035 (FFTHX): Fidelity's Target Date Fund has enjoyed noteworthy success for the past three years, delivering a three year average of 15%, while charging a reasonable .81% yearly management fee. Fidelity boasts an extensive research team for equities and broad experience managing a range of asset classes. The one caveat for this attractive offering lies in the company's penchant for changing managers.

While "Target Date Funds" may not produce an immediate "bull's eye" achieving the highest investment score in the next six months, they are an excellent choice for the prudent investor seeking a predictable source of income in retirement.

-Robert Miller, Devotion

The President's Hours for November

Membership Drive/School Visits: 13
Membership/Finances: 14
Mtgs. w/BEU Members & Activists: 22
MTA/NEA Mtgs. & Workshops: 7
Mtgs. w/Administration: 7
Paperwork & Office Support: 18
Grievance Work: 24
Community Relations: 1
Internal Communications: 24
Staying Organized: 23.5



This totals 153.5 hours for the month of November

BEU CALENDAR

December 3:

Executive Board Mtg.

December 10:

Reps Council Mtg.

December 17:

Committee Mtgs.

December 22-31:

Winter Break

January 7:

Executive Board Mtg.

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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Jody Curran, President

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