

## ***BEU CALENDAR***

- Jan 23 Reps Council Mtg.**  
*BHS Room 258 3:15*
- Jan 25 Full Action Team Mtg.**  
*BHS Room 238 3:15*
- Jan. 26 Lower Devo Pizza for Paras**  
*10:30-1:30*
- Jan 27 Hearing on charge against BEU, Dept. of Labor Relations**
- Jan 30 Grievance Team Mtg.**  
*BHS Room 240 3:15*
- Feb 1 ALANA event**  
*Golden Temple, 4:30-6:30 (see below)*
- Feb 2 BHS Para Mtg (Pizza for Paras)**  
*MLK Room 11:15-1:00*
- Feb 9 "The Schools Our Communities Deserve": Brookline community forum**  
*(see to right)*
- Feb 13 Reps Council**  
*BHS Room 258 3:15pm*
- Feb 15 "We Love Our Paras! networking event**  
*Golden Temple, 6:00-8:00pm (see below)*
- Feb 27 Grievance Team Mtg.**  
*BHS Room 240, 3:15*

## **2 NETWORKING EVENTS AT GOLDEN TEMPLE!**

-- complementary refreshments served --  
*(All educators represented by the BEU welcome -- come and express your solidarity!)*

ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) Staff of our schools.

Wed. Feb 1, 4:30-6:30

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"We Love Our Paras!" Night

Wed. Feb 15, 6:00-8:00

Please rsvp to: [jeanette\\_lindor@psbma.org](mailto:jeanette_lindor@psbma.org)

*RSVP NOW!* [TINY.CC/RVSPFORUM](http://TINY.CC/RVSPFORUM)

## **BEU EDUCATORS & COMMUNITY UNITE IN ORGANIZING FEB. 9 FORUM FOR EDUCATION JUSTICE**

While progress has been made at the bargaining table, the latest success being the settling of the BEU administrators' contract on January 17, the School Committee continues to drag its feet in reaching a fair settlement for paraprofessionals. Their disrespectful failure to agree to pay our lowest paid educators a livable wage has led BEU educators and concerned Brookline parents and others to intensify an alliance that has been growing during the long haul in which BEU educators have struggled to see their collective voice be trusted and

respected by the current School Committee.

Together, the BEU educators and concerned residents are organizing a community forum, "The Schools Our Communities Deserve," to be held on Thursday, February 9 at All Saints Church, 1773 Beacon Street at Dean Road from 7-8:30. (Come at 6:30 for music and refreshments.) Childcare is available. **Please rsvp using the url [tiny.cc/rsvpforum](http://tiny.cc/rsvpforum)**

What are the lessons of the still unfinished contract negotiation process?

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## **PROBLEMS WITH COLLEAGUES OR PARENTS? WHAT TO DO**

Most professional development is focused on our work with students, but there can be less support for our interactions with other adults: parents, of course, supervisors, and colleagues. Here are some suggestions about this neglected but important area of building effective and mutually respectful professional relationships .

### **What do you do when challenges arise between colleagues?**

The teacher in the next room speaks in loud tones to her students and it's disturbing your class: what do you do?

You notice a colleague reprimanding a student in a harsh manner: what do you do?

In trying to work collaboratively with a colleague, you feel disrespected: what do you do?

You have a problem with your co-teacher's instructional strategies for special needs students: what do you do?

Your classroom aide comes in just a bit late on most days and this causes difficulty with getting certain students on task: what do you do?

Many of us have had these or similar kinds of difficulties in our work lives. How do we handle these types of situations? As in almost all situations,

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# HEALTHY AND SAFE?

Dear Contract Corner,

*Last week, a student of mine got angry and stomped on the top of my foot. At first, I shook it off and went about my business. But after it still hurt days later I went to the doctor and discovered I have a fracture. Can I get Worker's Comp for the money I spent on copays and other related costs of going to the doctor (like parking fees).*

*Signed,  
A Bit Bruised*

Dear A Bit Bruised,

I'm sorry this happened to you. Just as we want to offer a safe environment for our students, teachers and staff have the right to a safe and harm-free work environment. Teachers do not receive Workers' Compensation. Instead, here are some steps you can take.

•First, make sure to file an accident report in your building. Your building secretary should be able to provide you with a form.

•Second, there are two sections in our Collective Bargaining Contract to look at. Section 4.10 A says, The BSC agrees to maintain a healthful and safe work place. Disputes hereunder shall be subject to the grievance procedure but shall not be arbitrable. The parties will utilize a mutually agreed upon private mediator to assist in reaching agreement on unresolved disputes. The cost will be shared equally by both parties. If you cannot reach an agreement through discussions with your supervisor or Human Resources, there is some recourse to go through the Grievance procedure.

•The other section is 5.5 H which explains some reimbursable medical expenses due to injury on the job.

While it excludes copays and deductibles, we feel like it is only fair to ask for these in cases where the injury was caused by students or clear unsafe working conditions. We should not be adversely affected financially for injuries caused by those we are hired to teach and care for. Feel free to contact the Grievance Team if you feel like you need help with any of the above.

Signed,  
Contract Corner

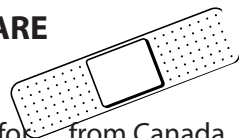
By the way, did you know that the BEU has a new Health and Safety Chairperson? His name is RJ Cross. His role is to be a conduit between the BEU and the Building Department. If you feel that there are unsafe conditions in the building where you work and you need some help figuring out what to do, contact RJ at [ronaldjamescross@gmail.com](mailto:ronaldjamescross@gmail.com)

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email the BEU at [beu-mta@hotmail.com](mailto:beu-mta@hotmail.com) or call the office at 617-277-0251. One of the following grievance committee members will get back in touch with you.

- Deb Allen (Devotion, retired)
- Jody Curran (Driscoll)
- Hillary Golden (Lincoln)
- Mark Goldner (Heath)
- Rich Gorman (BHS)
- Anna MacIver (Runkle)
- Shelley Mains (BHS)
- Susan Moreno (BHS)
- Jill Sifantus (BHS)
- Susan Stark (BHS)
- David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)
- Jessica Wender-Shubow (system)
- Sue Zobel (Lincoln)



## YOUR HEALTH CARE



It is clearly an unsettled time for health insurance at the federal level and in our state, and this makes it as important as ever for Brookline employees to stand together in defense of their collectively bargained health benefits.

On the national stage on January 11, some Democrats joined Republicans in blocking a measure of Sen. Bernie Sanders supporting the importing of more affordable drugs

from Canada. By coincidence, on that very day, representatives of Brookline's public employee unions who make up the group that negotiates your healthcare benefits were learning from a consultant who met with us and the Town that the state Group Insurance Commission (GIC) would most likely be passing on more of the cost of rising drug costs to employees.

Meanwhile, the town makes no secret of the fact that they would like

to change the "83%-17% split" in the town's favor, which would mean higher premium costs for employees.

But as PSB noted at a recent School Committee meeting, the move to the GIC in 2011 saved the Town budget \$5.6 million and the arrangement has served the Town very well since then. So, while MTA is leading our fight to resist decisions by the GIC that are bad for employees (see [www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)), when bargaining starts, Brookline unions will need the support of members in letting the town know that we've done our part!

## COLLEAGUES AND PARENTS continued from page 1

it is best to approach your colleague directly, explaining your perceptions and offering help if appropriate. However, this can be very difficult at times. In a setting where we have employee advocates (union building reps, grievance reps and union officers/leaders), we encourage you to bring the matter to the employee advocate in your building for advice and assistance in dealing with the problem if approaching your colleague did not get the results you were hoping for. While it may be tempting to take the matter to your supervisor and ask him or her to "do something about it" remember that you are involving yourself in someone's employment relationship. This is no trivial matter.

The supervisor has the power to alter that relationship to the detriment of your co-worker, and the outcome might be very different than you expected.

Very often the employee advocate, who has no power over the employment relationship, can help you speak with your co-worker or speak to him/her on your behalf in a non-threatening manner. The most effective approach may very well be to seek assistance in this way. After all, it is in the interest of the union to not only defend its members but also to educate them about what kinds of behavior could get them in trouble in the first place.

### **Parent-Teacher Relations:**

Parents and teachers are partners in the education of children. But what do you do when your partner in

this special relationship has a problem with something you're doing or not doing? What's the most effective way to handle complaints that your parent partner may make?

Like the grievance procedure, problems are best handled at the lowest level possible, that is, directly between the parent and teacher in this case. If a parent approaches you with a problem, verbally or in writing, do your best to respond directly and in a receptive way. Trying to understand, and responding/reacting/explaining will be most effective when you communicate in a clear, non-defensive manner. Remember that to every parent her/his child is special and unique. Responding positively, sharing your thoughts, ideas and experiences and assuring parents that you are interested in what they have to say will go a long way to ending the situation there. In most cases, you will resolve the problem and you will have developed a strong ally.

Always keep a log of the parent contacts you have and a few brief notes to record the nature of the conversation and what agreements/resolutions were reached. Note dates, times, names of those present at a meeting. It's also a good idea to keep a copy of any correspondence you send to parents.

*Sometimes, however, you might find that this approach is not enough. Some informal BEU support can help and you should be able to count on support from your supervisor, too.*

Occasionally, a parent complains about you directly to an administrator. The most efficient and effective

approach is for the supervisor to first urge the parent to speak directly with the teacher. Some parents may want to make "anonymous" complaints, stating a fear that their child will experience "retaliation" from the teacher. Administrators need to explain to parents that anonymous complaints cannot be handled properly. In turn, teachers need to be receptive in order to reassure parents that such a fear is unfounded.

If a parent and teacher have communicated but haven't reached a common understanding, it's okay to ask for help. The BEU may be able to give you advice, and it is private advice. Your administrator should support you, too. This works best when they meet with you and the parent(s) separately and then together, acting as a mediator who respects the perspective of each of the parties. As the teacher, it is perfectly appropriate for you to ask your principal to handle such a situation in this way.

Remember to keep a log, keep good notes of exchanges, and seek out assistance from the BEU if you feel you are really in the "hot seat." Keep your antennae up and ask for help and/or advice early on. And remember your "Weingarten Rights" – your right to representation if you believe a meeting with a supervisor could lead to discipline. Don't forget: a little good will can go a very long way, but once in a while, an especially tough situation arises, and in that case, you should be able to count on support from the BEU and your supervisor in reaching an amicable resolution.

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Forum, continued from Page 1

The tentative agreement reached for administrators reflects some of the concerns that will be raised at the forum. Pay for added days of work reflects recognition of the fact that administrators who evaluate teachers face double the evaluation workload as a result of bureaucratic state-imposed evaluation regulations. Now, the same corporate-sponsored state

"ed reformers" are threatening to require use of student test scores in rating teachers. Many in the community are concerned with this, and the current School Committee's pledge to "use student learning data... at all levels of the system to drive continuous improvement." Both cut into time to develop meaningful relationships with each whole, unique child. The respected organizations Brookline

Pax, Citizens for Public Schools, and Brookline for Racial Justice and Equity (BRJE) are organizing the forum with BEU educators. Joining them is the new Brookline Parents Organization.

The event will explore how we can promote the progressive, democratic values, including racial and economic justice, that are essential to the educational excellence of our public schools.

# FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

## MUCH ADO ABOUT DEBT



**“Neither a borrower or ...” a late credit card payer be** – When the Federal Reserve decided to hike the prime lending rate, as it recently did by .25%, credit card borrowing became more expensive. By February, you can expect an increase in the rate you pay on any outstanding credit card balances, with more increases in the pipeline for 2017. In fact, it’s a distinct possibility that borrowers will see as much as a 1% increase in 2017. And remember that in accordance with the CARD ACT law, lenders don’t have to notify you of any increase!

Since the average American family with credit card debt in 2016 owes \$16,061.00, and many opt for the minimum monthly payment option, it might be helpful to examine the ill-advised strategy of paying the monthly minimum. In the case of a family making the minimum monthly payment on a balance of \$16,061.00 at 17%, it would take over three decades to pay off the original loan while paying a staggering \$22,959.03 in interest.

**Dispensing with Credit Card Debt** – Digging yourself out of that deep and depressing debt hole can be daunting. One financial tool strategy to consider is pay more than the monthly minimum and establish a manageable automatic monthly payment plan with your bank over the life of the loan. In the case of the debt illustration above with a balance of \$16,061.00 at 17%, a fixed monthly payment of \$400.00 would retire the loan in 60 months, as opposed to 387 months or 32 year years if you pay the minimum. The fixed payment approach also saves you over 14K in interest payments.

**You Can Run but You Can’t Hide When It Comes to Student Debt** – It’s a disheartening statistic, but student debt in USA has cracked the trillion dollar ceiling with the average graduate leaving college with \$37,132 in student loans in 2016. Two widespread fallacies about student debt hold that you can ignore the payments with impunity, and second you can always declare bankruptcy. First, there are consequences to not paying. The federal government can either garnish your wages or simply, and legally, take your tax refund. In addition, many shocked and chagrined retirees receiving SSI who worked in the private sector, and defaulted on paying student loans, have had their day of reckoning. Beginning in 2001, the federal government has collected \$1.1 billion by garnishing retirees SSI benefits.

Unless you can prove “undue hardship,” you’re probably not a good candidate for discharging your debt burden by declaring bankruptcy. The bar for “undue hardship” has been set very high by the courts and requires proof of both a herculean effort to repay the loan – think of a Gandhi-like minimalist existence - or a serious illness that prevents you from working.\*

**The next 403b Enrollment Meeting will be held in the Lincoln School faculty room on Thursday, February 2 at 3:10 PM.**

\* One of the many good reasons to oppose Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary is she stands to earn significant sums from her investments in the student debt collection industry, a clear conflict of interest--*editor*

-Robert Miller, Devotion

### The President’s Work

#### Negotiations

The BEU continues its negotiations with the central administration over the now expired teacher evaluation system. We’ve had a series of productive sessions. Meanwhile, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) appears to be forging ahead with a terrible plan to force evaluators to use student test scores in determining a teacher’s Summative Rating.

*Do you think your current students’ scores reflect your capacity as a teacher?* The Sharon School Committee has publicly joined teachers in opposing the plan. (See DDMs at [www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)). What about the Brookline School Committee?

*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, billed late spring or summer.*

#### THE BROOKLINE EDUCATOR

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