

BEU CALENDAR

- Nov 20 Grievance training/mtg**
BHS rm 020 11:00 am-5:00 pm
- Nov 29 Para Joint Labor Mtg on seniority, scheduling**
Town Hall 2:00 pm
- Dec 1-2 MTA "Getting Real About Race" Conference**
Framingham, Fri. evening & Saturday (Contact Jess for more info)
- Dec 4 Coffee/house party with parents (see below)**
- Dec 4 Executive Board Mtg**
BHS rm 258, 3:15-5:00
- Dec 6 BEU ALANA social event**
Golden Temple, 3:30-5:30
- Dec 11 Reps Council Mtg: Meet MTA candidates (see below)**

BEU MEMBERS INVITED!

MON, DEC. 4, 7-9PM

HOUSE PARTY WITH PARENTS

DISCUSS "HOW DO WE EDUCATE CHILDREN TO BE HAPPY & HEALTHY LIFETIME LEARNERS?"

INFO & RSVP:

WWW.OURBROOKLINESCHOOLS.ORG

MON, DEC. 11

3:15-4:15PM,

BHS RM. 020

MEET AND QUESTION THE

CANDIDATES FOR MTA

PRESIDENT & VICE-PRESIDENT

MORE INFO:

BROOKLINE.MASSTEACHER.ORG

Losing the Forest for the Trees

We all know aphorisms that remind us of the danger of trying to fix a problem while allowing a deeper problem that caused it to persist. We've been told, "Don't lose the forest for the trees," not to "rob Peter to pay Paul," and not to "rearrange seats on the Titanic." It's not difficult to find analogies in our buildings. Here's one: a slew of Unit A educators and paraprofessionals are told to attend a training during class. They are promised subs. Then many subs don't arrive. So, staff members scramble to supply the coverage. In a cascading set of effects we find that in one room a paraprofessional who serves a child 1:1 ends up teaching the class. The child's IEP is violated. In another room, a teacher gives up her lunch and prep period to cover for another missing sub. With no time to locate the lesson plan, the lesson doesn't happen that day. A third classroom loses its classroom para, who has been sent to relieve the teacher who missed her prep while covering for the missing sub. The entire class is disrupted due to the lack of the para. Other paras and teachers never get lunch and/or a prep that is due them. Were this to happen once, few would bring it up, but the truth is, loss of preps and lunches, contractual violations, are becoming endemic. This must be stopped.

There's a deeper problem here that no one has time to consider while they are running around: the district is causing this problem by adding too much to educators' jobs and workdays, thereby requiring paras and subs to do the teaching. The paras and subs are being expected to do this without adequate pay or recognition. That is why there is a sub and para shortage. Just as trees are part of an ecosystem, a classroom is integral to "the ocean liner" that one headmaster liked to use as a metaphor for a school. It takes everyone's critical insight to make sure that a ship is seaworthy. Piecemeal fixes on the surface deck will allow the overload to persist and increase.

Understandably, our educators want to jump in to help when the need arises. Culturally, we are encouraged to just focus on the moment and on what one individual or isolated team can do. This is particularly true, not surprisingly, during a crisis. Consider the popular story of the heroic Little Dutch Boy. He is credited with saving Holland merely by plugging a hole in the dike with one little finger. He understands that a small breach in the system can have a cascading effect. Maybe he hates to see others burdened, so he steps up and suffers through the night, immobilized, until he is discovered and engineers can repair the breach.

But what happens when the structural flaws in the levee system spring multiple holes because the pressure on the whole system is too great? That is exactly what is happening all over our understaffed and over-scheduled school district. Educators are not only managing an increasing number of emergencies instead of teaching, they are being expected to routinely help to overload the system themselves.

The district is quick to list and celebrate its many exciting initiatives -- Faculty Learning Teams, racial equity PD, instructional coaching, grade level common planning, child study groups, an elaborate educator evaluation system, con-

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THE IMPACT OF INITIATIVES



Dear BEU,

My principal has asked me to be on a "leadership team" which will help shape the policies at our school. I'm really flattered that she thinks so highly of me! At our first meeting, the principal talked about some ways that she wants to change the way the school is organized and scheduled. I'm surprised that our team seems to have so much sway and power with this principal. Is this ok?

Concerned Ambitious Teacher

Dear Concerned Ambitious Teacher,

You need to know that the principal can't decide on changes to working conditions (length of work day, preps, etc.) on his/her own. They also can't use teacher-leaders to make these kinds of decisions. Any change in working conditions must be negotiated with the BEU, which is the exclusive representative of its members.

The principal has the authority to dictate policies that don't impact working conditions. For example, they might like to have the professional development have a particular focus for the year. While it's nice to solicit feedback and ideas from the staff, it's in their power to shape things like that - as long as it doesn't negatively impact the workload.

The principal may not unilaterally increase a person's workload, even if it's in the name of a particular educational mission. For example, at some schools teachers have been told to come in 5-10 minutes early every day to open up classrooms for students. While this may sound good, requiring teachers to do this constitutes an increase in the length of the work day. The district can always try to bargain such an increase in the length of the work day - say, by increasing our salary - but until that happens you can't be required to set foot in your classroom until the contractual start of your school day.



If you are serving on a leadership team which is exploring new initiatives for your school, be aware of the effect of unintended consequences. Does this new initiative add to the workload? Even if you think it's a worthwhile idea, it may impose a burden on others. Consider also the "bandwagon" effect. Once a new voluntary initiative has been adopted by a critical mass of teachers, then it can become a de facto expectation. If you are on a team that is rolling out such an initiative, are you thinking about all stakeholders involved? It is important to consider the downstream impacts on colleagues and resources even if they don't seem related to the initiative.

Contact the BEU grievance committee if you have questions about your role on any sort of leadership team and how you can be sure to protect yourself and your colleagues even as you take on leadership at your school.

Sincerely,
Contract Corner

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email beu-mta@hotmail.com or call the BEU 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)
- Jen Hanaghan (BHS)
- Anna MacIver (Runkle)
- Shelley Mains (BHS)
- Susan Moreno (BHS)
- Jill Sifantus (BHS)
- Susan Stark (BHS)
- David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)
- Jessica Wender-Shubow
- Sue Zobel (Lincoln)



“LOSING THE FOREST....” continued from page 1

stant online presence, chasing test score gaps, and the inclusion model. However, a system is greater than the sum of its parts. No matter the value of any initiative considered in isolation and in theory, under present conditions, the totality is degrading the quality of the parts. Unfortunately, district leadership is not encouraging staff to critically examine the system as a whole and to ask the question, “What are the effects of layering multiple responsibilities on top of one another during the same minute?” How many initiatives can be piled on top of one another in the day without diminishing the quality of student-teacher interaction? The administration isn’t showing any sign of asking this question of themselves either. Moreover, blaming individual teachers for problems that are systemic is unacceptable. More training won’t fix this.

It has come time for the BEU members to step in to 1) uphold contractual rights designed to create a functional, humane school day for children and adults alike, and 2) to enter into serious discussions about what is, and is not working, not in the abstract, but under current staffing and scheduling conditions. Too many educators are losing their basic, contractually protected, and hard-won right to have a manageable school day: a restful lunch break and time to think and reflect, not scramble to meet untenable work expectations. By insisting that the administration meet its contractual obligations, a united BEU membership can help ensure that the deeper problems of staffing and programming will be addressed.

The BEU Workload Oversight Committee has posted a Statement of Principles at <https://brookline.massteacher.org> encouraging fellow union members to support its work and that of the BEU as a whole by doing the following:

1. *Communicate with one another about challenges we face in our working lives. What are the workload issues in your job, in your building, across the district?*
2. *Organize and/or attend BEU meetings to facilitate this dialogue and actively support organized BEU efforts to end excessive workload.*
3. *Remember that time crunches are a structural problem of excessive work demands and expectations and not the fault of the individual educator. Honor and support your colleagues as they exercise their professional autonomy in choosing how to use their work time.*
4. *Promote collective action and member solidarity in support of efforts by individual educators or groups of educators to limit workload to reasonable levels and maintain high quality services to students.*

Please send updates, give feedback, and share your thinking about this important work with the Workload Oversight Committee (Jeremy Bloch, Alisa Conner, Laura Vish, and Jess Wender-Shubow) at: beuworkloadfeedback@gmail.com

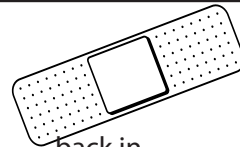


YOUR HEALTH CARE

The PEC (Town and School Unions) and Town Administrators continue to bargain a new Healthcare Agreement. Our current GIC plan expires June 30, 2018. Basically the bargaining is down to two choices, Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) and our current carrier, the GIC.

BCBS has offered us a competitive one year package with a guaranteed first year premium, but anything could happen to premiums in years two and three. Some other communities near Brookline have had high second year rates and then double digit third year rates.

Our current GIC plan will see changes in the 2018-2019 year. It could be the inclusion of new carriers and/or the consolidation/removal of current plans. If we leave the GIC we could not re-enter for at least three years. Many of us would lose our popular Tufts Navigator, Harvard Independence and Fallon Health Select Care because they are already closed to new members and many of us who already enrolled could find ourselves not allowed to get



back in.

However, the GIC has thousands of state employees and municipalities included in their plans and frankly, comparatively speaking, we feel there is strength in numbers. Once the Commissioners know how many enrollees they will have statewide, they will make decisions and present the new benefit plans sometime in February. Unfortunately we have to make our decision to renew with the GIC by December 1. Jessica Wender-Shubow and I would welcome any questions or comments.

The Open Enrollment period for BEU-sponsored Long-Term Disability Insurance deadline has been extended to December 22. For details, see for the keyword “disability” at brookline.massteacher.org.

Take care....Sheila Leach 2sheilaleach@gmail.com

-Sheila Leach, PEC Rep

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

MUCH ADO ABOUT INVESTING



Morningstar, and the flickering five star rating: If you want to purchase a finely balanced, elegant Chardonnay that bewitches your mouth, you might look to the expert advice provided by the likes of the Wine Spectator or Robert Parker. If you're shopping for a mutual fund, the "go-to reference guide" for individual investors, financial advisors and even pension funds, is Morningstar. Their ratings service provides a wealth of information for investors including management fees, performance data, an in-depth analyst report and, of course, the coveted and often misinterpreted five star rating. (All funds are assigned a 1-5 star performance rating with one being the lowest and five the best.)

"Past performance does not guarantee future returns." Somehow investors ignore this investment *caveat* and regularly engage in "performance chasing" when they join the stampede to purchase a fund recently assigned Morningstar's five star rating. Inevitably, investors are swayed by past performances, purchase last year's winner and overlook the adage that yesterday's returns are not predictive of tomorrow's performance. Simply put, "performance chasing" leads an investor directly onto the path of poor results. In the words of the legendary economist John Maynard Keynes, "There is a danger of expecting the results of the future to be predicted from the past."

In short, Morningstar should be used as a comprehensive financial reference guide for screening mutual fund purchases not as predictor of tomorrow's winner. (At a bare minimum, investors should evaluate funds based on at least 3-5 years of performance data.)

Selecting a Financial Advisor: When you hire a financial advisor, you might reasonably assume that they're ethically and legally obligated to act in your "best interests" when providing financial advice. Wrong! Unless you hire a financial professional bound to a "fiduciary standard," they have no obligation to disclose a conflict of interest, not to mention their fees and commissions. In fact, many brokers, insurance professionals and others in the financial industry are only bound by the low bar of "suitability standard" when recommending financial products.

Let's shed some light on the sometimes questionable practices of financial professionals only obligated to live up to the "suitability standard." In an individual's portfolio I reviewed from a large, financial services company, I quickly noticed a potential, tell-tale pattern of conflict of interest; all of the recommended mutual funds for the client's portfolio came from the broker's company. Ideally, the mix for an investor's portfolio should consist of a collection of funds from different companies and include both index funds and actively managed funds.

One of the more egregious examples involved this broker selecting a "suitable" international fund. In this case the broker selected an in-house, international fund charging an excessive 1.14% management fee that had returned a lackluster 6.88% return over the past three years. Meanwhile, a financial advisor bound by the "fiduciary standard" would have likely expanded the search to include a fund like Vanguard's International Growth that charges a .46% fee while averaging 11.16% over the past three years.

In my next article, I hope to provide you with some guidance and screening questions on how to select a financial advisor who will be obligated always to act as a fiduciary!

-Robert Miller, Devotion, retired

The President's Work

While all BEU committees are coordinating member resistance to over-scheduling that violates contractual rights, additional BEU work is underway.

-- Paras are launching a committee in the new contract tasked with working with management to: clarify the probationary period, design seniority protections for Paras, and devise solutions to scheduling.

-- Negotiations Chair, Eric Schiff, Pete Rittenburg, Kyle Williams and I are negotiating stipends.

-- Unfortunately, the School Committee has filed a prohibited labor charge against the BEU because we did not hold a ratification vote for teachers before the date paras and Unit B voted. The "trial" is Dec. 1 at the Dept. of Labor Relations.

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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Amie Buchman, Communications Chair

Jessica Wender-Shubow, President