

## Alliance forum challenges claims about MCAS

On January 30, the Alliance for Brookline Schools (of which the BEU is a member) held a community forum on the impact of MCAS on our school district. Here is BHS English teacher, Jen Rose-Wood's report:

The MCAS forum was inspiring. Speakers included activist leaders and Brookline parents and teachers. Art teacher Marianne Taylor, math specialist Jennifer Jordan, and Special Education teacher, Brenna Mahoney spoke directly to the negative impact the testing has had in Brookline. Jennifer said that MCAS stands in stark contrast to a growth mindset. "Kids

don't see the incremental progress that they are making - they only see the end result, and that perpetuates the belief that either they are math people or they are not. Students know that MCAS is important and has consequences for themselves and for their schools. When so much importance is placed on one test, it is hard for them to internalize the alternate messages teachers send all year."

Marianne said that testing and test preparation is not closing achievement gaps, they are creating them by increasingly focusing on comparing standardized measures. "The message of our testing culture is this: what is unmeasurable is insignificant. But isn't *the wonder* of so many things (art, poetry, comedy) the fact that they are unmeasurable? Even the agendas of our faculty meetings are becoming so highly structured that teachers have little freedom to bring in critical perspectives. Speaking 'outside the protocol' feels like an act of disobedience. Take away the autonomy, the creativity--take away everything FUN--and you know what you get? Bored, defiant kids and a national teacher shortage."

Brenna Mahoney, who was home sick with the flu, sent a moving and personal statement about the negative impact she has seen testing have on her students. They are disproportionately young men of color who have grown up in poverty, she noted. "Some will be first-generation high school graduates. They don't need a high-stakes test to tell them the value of a diploma; they know that it means opportunity. My students are very aware that they will not receive a diploma without a passing score, and

as their teacher, I feel immense pressure to ensure their success. I've been preparing students for this exam my entire career, and I do it well. Despite the stress, anxiety, and long hours of assessments, the majority of BHS students pass. Unfortunately, I no longer feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments."

Brenna emphasized that her students are pulled from enriching classes for test prep, that the stress causes burnout for teachers and students alike. Students with disabilities lose critical time to learn vocational and life skills. "I also question whether the high-stakes MCAS exams are keeping students from attending more inclusive classes. I wonder how many special education TEAMS recommend these segregated settings, because they know those classes will prep for the MCAS, ensuring a diploma. Yes, these classes may assist students with passing the tests, but the grade-level gaps widen as students remain separate from their peers. This sort of preparation is not filling in the gaps; it's teaching to a groundless test."

Jeanette Deutermann came up from Long Island where she is a parent/activist; New York has the biggest opt-out movement in the country. Jeanette helped organize Long Island's opt-out movement with the result that 50% of the students there now opt out of NY's high stakes test. She said, "If you believe testing is a problem, stop participating in it: opt out!"

Ricardo Rosa gave us the biggest picture, characterizing high stakes testing as white supremacy and an evasion of the real problem facing education, which is disinvestment in

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### **BEU CALENDAR**

#### **Joint Labor-Management**

**Committee meeting on  
para fair scheduling and job  
security**

*Tue Feb 13, 3:00 pm*

#### **Workload Oversight**

**Committee meeting**

*Wed Feb 14, 3:30 pm*

#### **Meeting with Management**

**on Para Time-sheet  
implementation**

*Thu Feb 15, 3:30 pm*

#### **February Vacation**

*Mon Feb 19-23*

#### **Grievance Team**

*Mon Feb 26, 3:15 pm*

*BHS Room 240*

#### **Executive Board Meeting**

*Mon. Mar 5, 3:15 BHS*

*Room 258*

#### **Reps Council Meeting**

*Mon Mar 12 BHS room 020*

#### **Educators for a Democratic**

**Union Meeting**

*Mar 17 (location TBA)*



## WHO'S THE BOSS?

**Dear Contract Corner,**

***I love having opportunities to work with my colleagues but it's gotten harder and harder to find the time with all of the added paperwork, evaluation system demands, Special Education meetings and consults, and district initiatives. I need time to prepare to teach my lessons during the school day, to regenerate during lunch, and to manage all of my responsibilities before and after school. How do I respond to my principal or colleagues who encourage me to schedule and/or attend meetings during these times?***

**Thanks, Under Pressure**

Dear Under Pressure,

It's great that you checked in with your union. I know it can be hard to say you don't have the time to give, but these minutes are yours by contract. *Ask your supervisor (in writing is best) if you are being required to attend a meeting.* If you are, let them know you are losing (or lost) a prep or lunch for reasons out of your control, and you'd like the full session(s) to be rescheduled. The outcome of a recent grievance guarantees that you will be paid your daily rate for any lunch or prep that you lose involuntarily and that is not replaced in a timely manner (on the same day for k-5). Importantly, to qualify as replacements for a lost prep or lunch, the new time scheduled for you cannot involve you doing any added work. The minutes must be free, clear, and complete. (For example, minutes used for prepping for replaced prep time -- i.e., writing plans or explaining them to a sub, do not count as replaced minutes.)

I find it helpful to remember that educators fought for a contract that enables us to have quality of life and working conditions that make it possible to deliver and sustain quality services for our students.

Here are the blocks of time you are entitled to use as you see fit. Preps or lunches you do not give away voluntarily have to be returned to you as time, and failing that, as pay: 1) prep time listed in the contract for your job category, 2) the full duty free lunch period, 3) before or after the contractual school day, 4) the limit to 38 per year of 1 hour after-school meetings, 5) Collaboration time reserved for paired or group work (or occasionally, preparing for it) during which Unit A educators at all times choose what work to do and with whom.

**Dear Contract Corner:**

***From time to time, when I question my supervisor as to why we're doing something a certain way, she'll say: "The union forces us to do it this way." That seems a little harsh, but I'm wondering if it's true. I'm the only***

***one in my family in a union, and I've heard this kind of thing before. What's the deal?***

**Signed, Who's the Boss?**

Dear Who's the Boss,

I'm glad you signed your letter this way. There are a lot of urban myths out there about union leaders strong arming both its members and the other side into doing what they want. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The contracts that we negotiate with the School Committee are joint documents that we agree on at the end of our negotiating sessions. Neither side has hegemony over the other. In fact, provisions in the contract that seem to favor one side are often there because they were part of a give and take which probably resulted in the other side being favored in some way. In the end, both the School Committee and the BEU members ratify the contract, and in this way it is truly a joint agreement.

Another thing to keep in mind is that having a union is beneficial to both staff and administration when you think about it. As a guide, it allows us all to know the parameters of our jobs and when something being done is not enough or too much, meeting, exceeding, or falling short of expectations, etc. Without this guide, we are at the whim of the thoughts and feelings of whomever is in charge at any given moment.

Unions have power through the collective action of our members. Administrators and School Committees have power as granted through their job descriptions and the purposes set out by the community. Both sides sign agreements that guide us in our day to day work.

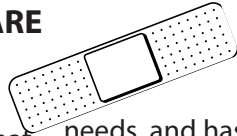
Sincerely,  
Contract Corner

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 BEU at 617-277-0251. A 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)  
Cathy Heller (BHS, retired)  
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)



## YOUR HEALTH CARE



The GIC, the state commission that manages our access to health insurance, is a public entity. So when they mimicked arrogant corporate, top-down management styles and suddenly up-ended healthcare arrangements for hundreds of thousands of public employees, the workers gave them a quick and effective lesson in what democracy looks like. After thousands bombarded the commission and Charlie Baker (who chooses its leadership) with calls, emails, and packed hearings after the fact, the GIC reversed its decision.

BEU Secretary, Jody Curran, joined hundreds of members from a range of public employee unions at a rally that showed the power of unified action. Here is a sense of what she reported:

*Barbara Madeloni (MTA president):* They tried to take the power from us: they scheduled their listening tour during work hours. They chose rooms too small to hold us. It's no coincidence that they're coming after us just as the anti-union Supreme Court Janus decision is coming. This is the moment to get the health care we deserve and to strengthen solidarity. We also want to push legislation we already have in the state house. We need more labor seats on the GIC.....

*Theresa McGoldrick from the National Association of Government Employees with 16,000 members:*

My family's plan has been eliminated. My son, adopted from Guatemala,

needs, and has had, great health care. Three commissioners are NAGE appointees and they were not notified. We need to stop this now.

*Karen Grosolsky from Weston:*

I've been a public school teacher for 19 years, with 2000 students I gave my greatest effort. I expect appropriate benefits. I need to see 11 doctors annually to keep cancer from returning. These are people who know me and know my care. I still need tests as well. Quick research shows my radiation oncologist doesn't take Unicare. I have little faith in their words. These changes are of great importance to all of us. Ask state reps to pass legislation to make sure these decisions are not made swiftly and in secret.

*Kimberly Steiglitz, Roxbury Community College, part of MTA:*

I take meds that make it possible for me to work. I need monitoring and adjustments to these meds. I love my job. The suddenness of these changes being proposed is unreasonable. I have a 15 year relationship with my doctors. I worry that I won't be able to keep working. I worked hard to get where I am and many of you have too. It's beautiful to see so many united here to fight for our rights.

*Andrew Baker, Lexington (1100 employees):*

Members say costs have been rising and quality lessening. My best friend has a two year old daughter who required a liver transplant and will require monitoring throughout her life.

Each year my friend spends hours pouring over the different plans. He fought and won Harvard to secure an important medication. Will he have to do that over and over again?

*Peter McKinnon, SEIU 509:*

This is solidarity, isn't it? Are you fired up? I come from a union family. My dad's union went on strike every 3 years. One long one was about health care. The power of unions -- they fought back and won. My father retired with 100% health care. Thousands of members of 509 called Baker and shut those phone lines down. They can't mess with us.

*Laura Wolfenden, Framingham:*

Nothing is more important than health care. I have cystic fibrosis. I need daily physical therapy and to be able to see my wonderful doctor. Tufts has covered it every step of the way. We are your public servants. We go into burning buildings. We stand between you and crime. We teach your children to read. Tell Baker to find his 20M dollars somewhere else. Reinstate our health plans!

*Barbara Madeloni:*

Why do we have to fight for quality health care? Paperwork, phone calls, just to get what they need for a child, to be able to go to work. It is outrageous that we have to be here. Why doesn't the GIC move us towards single payer? We were told it is because "they believe in competition." This is an opportunity for us to unite. In the future they're going for vouchers, high premiums and high deductibles. But when we fight, we win!

### MCAS continued from page 1

communities of color and poverty. He pointed out that that the majority of school closures and schools labeled as "failing" as a result of testing are in black and brown communities. Rosa is a UMass professor and is involved in the opt-out movement in New Bedford, where recently 450 students opted out.

I was struck by local activist Lisa Guisbond's piece of history that passing MCAS was not a graduation requirement at first and that Brookline parents and educators fought against it becoming one. Education reform in the state began in 1993 focused on addressing the state's vastly inequitable school funding, which prompted a lawsuit brought by low-income

districts. ("Brookline was named in the lawsuit to exemplify how rich in resources some districts were compared with others." But that focus has been lost. Still, Lisa also reported that of the 26 states that used to require high stakes tests as a graduation requirement, only 13 do now. To learn more, see "Test Reform Victories Surge in 2017" at FairTest.

## MUCH ADO ABOUT FINANCIAL RESOLUTIONS FOR 2018



Yes, a New Year has begun and the opportunity presents itself once again to resolve some financial problems and, in the process, simplify and quite possibly enrich your life. Here are few financial suggestions you might want to consider for your 2018 financial "to do list."

**Start Monitoring your Credit Score:** I can provide you with approximately 143 million reasons – the number of individuals whose personal information was compromised by the recent Equifax breach – for regularly monitoring your credit score. You don't want to be blindsided when it comes time to apply for a mortgage, a car loan or even refinancing your student loans. A low credit score (FICO) disqualifies you from the lowest loan rates and could cost you countless thousands.

**Consolidate and Refinance Student Loans:** I can provide you with 1.48 trillion reasons – the current onerous and burdensome level of student loan debt – why you might want to reconsider your current approach to paying off a student loan(s). Let's begin with stating the obvious: You need to systematically organize all your existing loans, including interest rates, monthly payments and projected payoff date on one spread sheet. The next step is to consolidate and refinance your existing loans into one loan, ideally at a lower rate – with a private lender like SoFi or CommonBond. (More about student loans in next month's article.)

**Establish a Roth IRA\*:** What better time to begin harnessing the powers of compounding, also referred to as the "8th wonder of the world" by Einstein. If you're a 30 year old teacher who begins funding a Roth IRA with an automatic deposit of \$100.00 per paycheck over the next 35 years – assuming a historically modest return of 8% - you will amass the wonderfully impressive sum of \$390,815 by age 65. And when you begin to make withdrawals from your Roth, the stream of income is tax-free! (Spring Roth workshops will be posted on BEU website.)

**Organize your Marital Finances:** When was the last time you sat down with your partner and discussed family finances and strategic planning for the future? Do you own a fireproof box that contains all your important financial papers, including a recent statement from both your investment accounts? Has your partner designated you as the beneficiary on all accounts? Have you both disclosed any outstanding debts, including credit card debt? Begin 2018 by making a new marriage vow to regularly work together on finances and live financially secure ever after.

**Write a Will:** I hate to repeat myself to Millennials and GenXers but "Not Writing a Will is so 1999." If you live in the state of MA, a will ensures that your assets will be distributed to your loved ones according to your wishes. Without a will, you are subject to a "MA will" or more accurately, the laws of intestate succession, and there sometimes unintended consequences. In MA if you're married and die without a will, your in-laws and descendants may have legal claim to half of your estate.

Don't wait, like Prince and the 70%, until "the party over" and "Oops out of time." Elevate Writing a Will to the top of your 2018 "to do list." Three highly recommended online options: Quicken Will Maker, Rocket Lawyer and Legal Zoom. Happy New Year's!

-Robert Miller, Devotion

### The President's Work

There's a lesson to be learned about the recent actions of the GIC. Labor representatives sat at the table alongside management appointees, including our own Town Administrator, Mel Kleckner. Undoubtedly, they all had many mutually-respectful and collegial discussions with one another. But the bottom line is that labor was allowed fewer votes. When those in control decided to disregard the voices of employees, it took organized, collective power for us to have an impact. Elected officials listened too. Organized labor is a key check on unfettered power today-in workplaces and government. This is the time to help strengthen your union as a key bulwark of real democracy under threat.

*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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