

BEU CALENDAR

**Mar 22 Daniel Koretz talk on
"The Testing Charade"**

*For information, search for
Citizens for Public Schools*

**Mar 24 March for Our Lives
Boston**

*Gather at Madison Park HS,
11:00am*

**Mar 24 Rotary Club Pancake
Breakfast**

*BEU volunteers needed, Contact
Kathy at kabitchcock@gmail.com*

Mar 25 Jewish Labor Seder

*For information, contact Jess at beu-
mta@hotmail.com*

**Mar 26 Deadline for
nominations for MTA Annual
Meeting Delegates**

*Send name(s) to BEUvoting@gmail.
com (see below)*

Apr 2 Executive Board Mtg
BHS Room 258 3:15pm

Apr 9 Reps Council Mtg.
BHS Room 020 basement, 3:15

Vacation: Apr 14-22

Apr. 23 Grievance Team
BHS room 240, 3:15pm

The Promise of Restorative Justice

Four of us from the BEU recently traveled to New York City to learn about Restorative Justice (RJ). Our own school district has begun to explore its use. One powerful RJ "circle" was organized at the high school in response some of the recent racist videos. A senior administrator has met with consultants, and the proposed FY19 budget includes a town hall based administrator to implement such practice district-wide.

Those of us on the BEU trip (BEU Vice President Bob Miller, BEU Diversity Chair and Metco Liaison Michelle Crawford-Cranmore, Steps to Success Advisor Jason Murray, and myself) make no special claim to expertise. We were struck by how long it takes to build community-wide respect for the voices of youth and adults on which RJ depends. As Lois Weiner, author of *The Future of Our Schools – Teachers Unions and Social Justice*, and one of our hosts (along with *Teachers Unite*), explained, "turn-key trainings" in which experts deliver a whole package for others to implement cannot create the kind of just community RJ envisions. It takes a bottom-up, self-reflective effort among adults and youth acting as partners.

TARGETING SYSTEMS

On our first day in NYC, we went to Brooklyn to sit in on a monthly meeting of a "cohort," a cross-generational group from a number of different schools. Recent challenges were shared in an effort to deepen the work of RJ in the buildings. We heard about "peer assists" using "mini-circles" focused on conflict resolution, including between adults and students. "Harm Circles" that widen the question to include how behaviors affected the community at large were discussed. One

educator noted that *Responsive Classroom* has a lot in common with RJ. But the scope of RJ is insitution-wide. Some were considering a school-wide campaign on the role of "peer leaders." In my group, a student's irritability about excessive homework was interpreted not as a behavior issue but as an opportunity for school-wide consideration of policy.

A *Youth Participatory Action Research* facilitator was in attendance. In PAR, students, families and front-line educators decide which questions are meaningful to them. They learn research skills as they find the answers. Their slogan is #nothing-foruswithoutus.

SHARING POWER ACROSS ROLES

The next day, at MS 324, the Patria Mirabel School in Washington Heights, we really felt the resonance of *Teachers Unite's* principal of unity, "we work in alliance with youth and parents to build democracy in our schools. We use Restorative Justice to build those alliances." We met with thirteen remarkable middle school peer mediators, all Black or Brown. Their classmates had elected them to be trained in the summer. These eloquent young leaders helped to train the teachers, in part by role-playing mediations at a faculty meeting. Dressing in specially marked hoodies to make it easy to find them in the halls, they explained how adults and youth alike approached them with requests for support and intervention and how their job was to help get to the root of a conflict. Over 40 mediations, some including parents, have been undertaken this year. Jason notes, "Since teachers are in a position of authority and they

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NOMINATE YOURSELF OR

COLLEAGUES TO RUN AS

DELEGATES TO MTA ANNUAL MEETING, MAY 4-5

Email your name, or that of other BEU members, by March 26 to: BEUvoting@gmail.com.

Voting: March 28-April 9: download ballot from brookline.massteacher.org under Documents and deliver to your building rep by April 9 or Ed Wiser at BHS by April 11 in sealed envelope with your name on outside.

The Contract Corner:

FINDING AND FIGHTING FOR THE CONTRACT



Dear Contract Corner,

I wonder a lot about the contract, and I'd like to look through it. But where do I go to find a copy of the contract? I'm also curious how fighting to protect the contract might help me personally.

Curious at Baker

Dear Curious,

Great questions! As a member of the BEU you have access to the BEU website (brookline.massteacher.org) There, you can find important documents, like the contracts that were recently ratified. The contracts are available to the public under the "Documents" tab. You don't even need to log in. There you will find copies of our recently ratified contracts.

(It's worth it to log in for other reasons. Once enough BEU members do, the website can become a place to have member discussions. If you have never logged on before, it's easy. Start at massteacher.org. Your username is your name as it appears on your MTA card, without your middle name; also make sure there's a space between your first and last name. Your password is your individual # on your MTA card, without any of the zeroes in front. If you don't have a card and want to know your member number, call 1-800-392-6175 x8259 and an MTA staff person will help you out.)

By fighting to protect the contract, the BEU grievance team has recently won protections that may affect you personally. Here are four important ones that you should know about:

1. If a para is assigned to cover for another para who is being paid at a higher rate, the covering para is now entitled to get paid at the higher rate for the time that they are covering in a class. It's important that you

keep track of your hours - and check your pay stub - to make sure that you are getting the extra money you are entitled to.

2. We've secured a guarantee that paras will get paid whenever they cover a class for a teacher. The district has now agreed to pay a para extra for every minute that they stand in for a teacher who is not present. Paras who take charge of a classroom will be paid half of the \$30 daily sub pay for any amount of class coverage up to 50% of the school day, and a full \$30 extra for any period of time between 51% and 100% of the day. An administrator authorizes this coverage.

3. At the High School, ETFs no longer have the added responsibility of scheduling subs for teachers attending IEP meetings.

4. Finally, the BEU recently won a grievance for a teacher who missed their prep time. This is a huge win for us. Any time you lose part or all of a lunch or prep (for example, because you don't get coverage, or you are required to attend an IEP meeting), you can be compensated for that missed time. Ask for coverage and document this, then let your school BEU rep, or a Grievance rep, know and they will help you out.

As always, if you have questions about the contract, or concerns about your own situation, don't hesitate to reach out to a member of the Grievance Committee.

Sincerely,
Contract Corner

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email the BEU at beu-mta@hotmail.com or call the BEU 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
Sue Zobel (Lincoln)



RJ, continued from page 1

ultimately hold the power, they are always the first ones to apologize if there is a conflict between them and a student."

We also heard from teachers. Their contract reserves PD time for RJ and there are a forty minutes reserved each day to practice RJ principles with students. Teachers spoke of the challenge of moving beyond the use of "restorative circles" alone. They said on reflection that they wish they had gone into the work with a broader plan in mind from the start.

LOOKING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

As the president seeks to "harden" schools, and some say lax school discipline is the cause of school shootings, the students we met join other young people who are awakening to the reality that political decisions are behind the violence in their lives. Yet the *Boston Globe* reports that many superintendents seek to direct students' attention away from a politics that is militarizing schools to various degrees, especially those where students of color are in the majority. As students we met told us, RJ is a model for what they can also do in the outside world.

WHERE TO WE GO FROM HERE?

Restorative Justice can transform institutions or it can be narrowed down

to being a tool of softer discipline that leaves intact what is unjust in a system. Today's education reform would have us focus on individuals and small groups while turning a blind eye to structural inequality that no amount of charitable generosity and sacrifice will change. Betsy DeVos made this corporate-sponsored education reform perfectly clear when she said on *60 Minutes*: "We should be investing in students, not in school buildings, not in institutions, not in systems." Her words evoke those of another proponent of what is today known as Neoliberalism, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who in 1987 infamously asserted, "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families."

Neoliberals (Democratic and Republican alike) do allow for one system, the market economy, and they are quick to say they are preparing students for it. However, their notion of the economy is inextricably tied up with their idea of individuals and families, and both are psychologically based. They are not concerned with social justice and how systemic, structural arrangements channel and limit choices. Psychology is assumed to be a force of nature to be left to scientific experts to discover and measure. Such experts will then tell educators

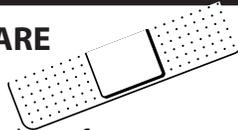
how to make individuals and families successful in an economy they describe in psychological terms, mostly of punishment and reward. If approached in isolation and as a matter of interpersonal relations alone, Restorative Justice risks being reduced to group therapy.

The challenge I take away from our trip to NY is whether or not we educators will unite and show the determination to lay out the political questions of funding and priorities at play in how and to what end we implement Restorative Justice practices. There are no lack of messages invoking an interpersonal ethic of care and generosity as they encourage educators to enjoy the rewards of stretching to the breaking point and somehow finding the time "for the kids." Will we stand up and defend racial and economic justice and dignity *for all* in our schools, regardless of role? Will we reject a culture in which teachers and students become winners or losers, competitors for privileged work assignments, "outcomes," college acceptances to unaffordable schools, and access to funding? Will we instead unite with parents to call for scheduling, staffing and case-loads that enable us to transform how our buildings address conflict, stress, and inequity in deep, structural ways?

-- Jessica Wender-Shubow



YOUR HEALTH CARE



The next few months will be busy for us concerning decisions we make about next year's healthcare. We successfully forced the GIC to reconsider their actions to limit the number of insurance carriers. They gave no notice to GIC participants and even some of their own Commissioners that they were planning to eliminate various health carriers. Our activism and outrage paid off. All current carriers are back for us to reconsider again.

Open Enrollment for next year starts April 4th and ends May 2nd. It is during this time only that we can change carriers. If we do not need to make a change, we do nothing and it stays the same. The GIC Decision Guide will be mailed to us by the end of March. As soon as it is published, it will be on the GIC website along with the schedule of thirteen statewide Health Fairs that will take

place during the month of April.

Right now the PEC (Public Employees Committee) is very active negotiating with the Town for a new Healthcare Agreement. Our current agreement expires June 30, 2018. One of the most important rights that we want to maintain is our split of 83% the Town pays / 17% that we pay for our health premiums. The Select Board is already making comments about what they want to do with money gained if this split is changed in their favor. They are targeting this money not for low wage worker's salary increases, but for more school administrators. The PEC will be pushing back and will keep you informed. Please feel free to ask questions and make comments. Take care..Sheila (2sheilaleach@gmail.com)

-- Sheila Leach, PEC rep

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

MUCH ADO ABOUT TAXES AND STUDENT LOANS



Taxes in 2018: "A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work." Proverbs 16:11. It would appear that many of the Senate's sanctimonious evangelicals, like speaker Paul Ryan, conveniently overlooked the wisdom of Proverbs when crafting the new tax bill. Who in their right mind could argue that there is a just balance, and a true middle-class tax cut when the top 1% receives 74% of all benefits and corporate taxes are slashed from 35% to 21%. Clearly, "the fix was in" when the weights were placed in the bag.

Notwithstanding the absence of fairness in the new tax bill, there are some clear benefits, even for those not in the top 1%.

- If you're single and earning less than \$82,500 in 2018, your bracket will fall from 25% to 22%. Even if you're at the top end of the salary scale and generating a six figure salary, your taxes will drop from 28% to 24%.

- If you're married, filing jointly and earning less than \$315,000, your bracket drops from 28% to 24%

- If you're single, the standard deduction has increased from \$6,350 to \$12,000. If you're married and filing jointly, the standard deduction almost doubles from \$12,700 to \$24,000.

Student Loans: Under the new tax plan, you're still permitted to deduct up to \$2,500 per year on the interest paid on a student loan. Unfortunately, that benefit phases out if you're single earning more than \$80,000 or a couple earning more than \$165,000.

Consolidating & SoFi: While I know that student loans, especially graduate loans, are a necessary evil for all educators, there are some attractive options for consolidating and refinancing your loans with SoFi: <https://www.sofi.com/refinance-student-loan/>

- Step #1: If you have multiple student loans, create a spread sheet that identifies the loan, monthly payment, balance, interest rate and expected pay-off date. (You should update this spread sheet twice each year.)

- Step #2: If you have good credit, contact SoFi and apply to both consolidate and refinance your loans.

- Step #3: If you have some discretionary income, consider paying down your loan's principal and shortening the loan's duration. By adding an additional \$100.00 principal payment each month to an \$80,000, 20 year student loan, you save over \$17,654 in interest payments and pay off the loan in 15 years.

If you have a parent PLUS loan(s) – and assuming you have good credit – you can refinance, lower your interest rate almost one full percentage point and, in the process, remove your parent(s) name from the loan.

The President's Work

The BEU members of the Workload Oversight Committee have recently submitted a formal information request to the superintendent concerning overarching workload challenges faced by caseload educators and general education teachers with students with Special Needs (IEPs, 504s, and non-evaluated students). The central administration is required by law to supply the information. The questions seek to understand how the district ensures that caseloads fair, appropriate and respectful of the professional judgement of the educator. We also want to know how teacher participation in IEP meetings is organized and how parents are told they can agree to let a teacher attend only part of a meeting.

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

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:

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BEU members discuss issues and find additional news at the website:

brookline.massteacher.com All members are encouraged to join using a personal email address.

Amie Buchman, Communications Chair

Jessica Wender-Shubow, President

-Robert Miller, Devotion