

## “THE DISRESPECT WE ALL FELT WAS GETTING TO BE TOO MUCH”

Brookline administrators are desperate to hire and retain paraprofessionals, while all staff members bear the burden of the district’s failure to fix this problem. Students and families also suffer the consequences. It is no surprise that Brookline is unable to retain paraprofessionals. For years, the district has resisted the BEU’s efforts to secure fair pay and proper respect for paraprofessionals. These issues will be on the bargaining table. **Be sure to read your weekly BEU Briefs for updates. Let us know if you are not receiving them (start by checking spam or Google “promotions” folders).**

Unfortunately, the lack of respect for paras is exemplified in the experience of a Baker School paraprofessional, Sana Iskandar. Experience similar to Sana’s seems to have been increasing, not decreasing.

Sana decided to leave in November. She had been working as a special education paraprofessional in the K-2 Learning Center for three years when she noticed that something was changing in how she was treated by senior administrators. There seemed to be a new approach trickling down from Town Hall and with it, worsening staffing problems.

BEU member, Remy Fernández-O’Brien did an exit interview with Sana:

**RFO: Can you tell me a little about what it was like working in the K-2 Learning Center at the beginning of the year?**

**SI:** We were always short-handed and I was asked to move into the role of a one-to-one aide. That was

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## BE SURE TO VOTE IN THE BEU ELECTION!

**BALLOTING WILL BE OPEN FROM MARCH 12 TO MARCH 26**

**ALL VOTING WILL BE DONE ELECTRONICALLY AT  
<http://tinyurl.com/2019-BEU-ballot>**

This year, BEU members will elect all officers of the union for two-year terms (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer). In addition, members will be electing 25 delegates to represent the BEU at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, to be held in Boston at Hynes Auditorium on May 3-4. The ballot also contains space for writing in up to 8 delegates for the National Education Association Representative Assembly. The ballots list nominated candidates and provides space for write-ins.

Please take a few minutes to show your support for BEU members who are stepping up to represent the educators in our bargaining units. Only dues paying members can vote. If you are eligible to be a member of the BEU/MTA/NEA and have not joined, we encourage you join us now. Find your rep’s name at [brookline.massteacher.org](http://brookline.massteacher.org). Your rep will sign you up.

## EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION

**A PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS IN THE MTA**

**STATE-WIDE MEETING, SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 10AM-NOON**

Location: Educational Association of Worcester. Learn about EDU at:  
**[educatorsfordemocraticunion.org](http://educatorsfordemocraticunion.org)**

## BEU CALENDAR

### Grievance Team Meeting

*March 18, 3:15—5pm*

*BHS room 258*

### Executive Board Meeting

*April 1, 3:15 – 5pm*

*BHS, Room 258*

### Race Reels: Brother

#### Outsider

*April 4*

*Pizza: 5:45, Film: 6 p.m.*

*MLK Room, BHS*

### Reps Council Meeting

*April 8, 3:15 – 4:45pm*

*BHS, Room 020*

okay because I loved working there. I would do whatever was needed. I loved working with that student, but I really wasn't trained to do some of the work that was required. We didn't have the paras called for, and it was stressful. Learning Center staff members were stretched thin and often they couldn't provide the required special education services. Even then, I still enjoyed my job—the school, the students, and my colleagues. But, the changes from central administration kept coming and the level of disrespect we all felt was getting to be too much.

**RFO: Paraprofessionals had a meeting with central administration to get answers about sweeping policy shifts, mid-year schedule changes, and why some paras are being paid an extra dollar per hour. What happened?**

**SI:** We prepared questions and they shot us down. They didn't give answers, and even *they* seemed confused about some of the changes. I was getting paid the one-dollar differential as school administration had promised. Though, representatives from central administration completely contradicted that message, saying we shouldn't be getting the differential. It just wasn't clear. When I asked about it, they implied that it might be taken out of my check. But, forget the money. The way we were treated—they were so dismissive. That meeting left a bitter taste in my mouth.

**RFO: Does the story of why you left Brookline start with that meeting in October?**

**SI:** Yes. I always knew that Brookline was known for having low pay for paras, but the impertinence at that meeting was the straw that broke the camel's back. They showed us they really don't appreciate their employees. Right then, I decided to look for a new job.

**RFO: What should Brookline administration take away from your experience?**

**SI:** I actually reached out to administration to discuss why I left, but no one responded. I'm now happily working in Weston, feeling respected and being paid much more. If Brookline wants to keep paras, they need to treat people fairly and with respect. Right

now, if someone asked me about applying to be a Brookline para, I would definitely say, don't. And it won't be long before Brookline starts to lose more of their valued paraprofessionals. Who could blame them?

Sana Iskandar's story is an all too familiar one. Paraprofessionals did not pursue work as educators to become rich. They value and find joy in working with students, collaborating with colleagues, and contributing to the success of our schools. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to locate that joy as paras feel the effects of blatant disrespect from district administration; the unfair wages are just rubbing salt in the wound. Poor pay reflects a school district that does not value the importance, skill, and dedication of paraprofessionals. The School Committee asserted that some educators are worth more than others by creating an arbitrary pay differential. They then move them around anyway on any given day, turning compensation into a mess. *We insist that all classroom and special education paras deserve a fair and livable wage on the same salary scale. The work they do is of comparable worth.*

Paraprofessionals provide support for our schools' most vulnerable children. Historically, they have volunteered their time to provide aid in crisis situations, to strengthen connections with students, or to jump in and support the school community. We know the challenges of paraprofessional work, yet paras have shown time and again that they are willing to make accommodations and step up when needed—often without being asked.

Now, they are routinely asked—even forced—to do more and work longer hours that interfere with other jobs. Confusing policies, nonsensical mid-year changes, and inefficient bureaucracy seem designed to insult paraprofessionals, rather than appreciate good will. *We head to the bargaining table with proposals to strengthen the paraprofessional contract, making approaches to scheduling more fair and respectful.*

Once again, we are faced with fighting for a paraprofessional contract that reflects the experience, skill, and education that paras bring to the Brookline schools. We urge you to give voice to these issues and demand that the School Committee acknowledge contractually the importance of retaining paraprofessional colleagues who experience dignity and are so desperately needed in our schools.

# CONTRACT CORNER: "A DAYS" EXPLAINED



New(er) and veteran teachers alike may feel confused about the deal with personal days, or, as these are known in the contract, "Administrative Leave." Here's a spotlight on the relevant contract language: The key points are in bold, followed by a breakdown of what it all means. Remember: "teacher" means all bargaining unit members who are not administrators or paras. (Paras get 2 "A Days")

Article 5, Section 5.5: Leaves of Absence with Pay

*A. Administrative Leave.* Each teacher shall be entitled to a total of **four days** of leave with pay during each school year. The teacher is required, with respect to two of such four days of leave with pay to give no reason to any person, but is **required with respect to the other two such days of leave to state orally, to the teacher's immediate supervisor the reason** for taking such leave, provided that **if any of such days falls on a Monday, a Friday or on a school day immediately preceding or following a holiday, a reason must be stated.** Each nurse shall be entitled to five (5) days of administrative leave with pay during the school year; no more than two (2) of said days may be taken without the advance approval of the Superintendent or his/her designee. The parties agree that such leave should be taken only for important personal reasons and not as vacations or for recreation.

## Here's the breakdown:

- **Unit A educators can take a total of 4 personal days.**
- **For two of these, you don't need to give any reason.**
- **For the other two, you may need to give your immediate**

supervisor a reason--and only orally.\*

- For any A day on a Friday, Monday, or day before or after a holiday, your supervisor may ask you for a reason.\*

**\*NOTE: The ONLY reason you need to give is "IMPORTANT PERSONAL BUSINESS." You do not have to and should not have to be any more specific.**

- These days are not supposed to just be days off.
- **ALSO: Supervisors can question members further if there is a pattern of absences or indication of misuse of A days. Otherwise, your supervisor shouldn't be questioning you.**
- **While we're all used to filling out forms for convenience' sake, no form is required as per the language of this contract.**
- **It's a little different for nurses:** nurses can take 5 personal days, and need advance approval for 3 of these.

Deb Allen (Devotion, retired)

Alisa Conner (BHS)

Jody Curran (Driscoll)

Hillary Golden (Lincoln)

Mark Goldner (Heath)

Rich Gorman (BHS)

Noah Gronland-Jacob (BHS)

Jen Hanaghan (BHS)

Cathy Heller (BHS)

Kathy Hitchcock (BHS)

Anna MacIver (Runkle)

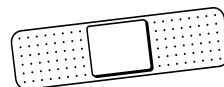
David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)

Sue Zobel (Lincoln)

Jessica Wender-Shubow



## OUR HEALTHCARE



FY2020 Open Enrollment for our GIC healthcare will take place from Wednesday, April 3, 2019 through Wednesday, May 1, 2019. All changes you choose to make in your healthcare, if any, must be decided during this time. There will be very few changes in our insurance plans for next year including plan designs, copays, and deductibles. There will be no increase in prescription drug copayments. This is also the time to look at your life insurance and dental insurance plans. If you decide not to make changes to your healthcare plan it will automatically renew. The Flexible Spending Account for active employees has to be renewed every year by signing up again.

In the next few weeks there will be specific information coming from the GIC:

- GIC Benefits Decision Guide 2019-2020 will be mailed to us at the end of March and will also be available online ([www.mass.gov/GIC](http://www.mass.gov/GIC)).
- Nine GIC Health Fairs will be held throughout the state. All major insurance carriers will have representatives there to answer your specific questions.

Brookline's will hold its Annual Benefits & Wellness Fair on April 4. Representatives from Flex Spending, Life Insurance, Dental Insurance, Retirement, Social Security, and Employee Assistance will be available. Ultimately, your specific healthcare information, questions and forms can be found at the Human Resources Office, Room 208, Town Hall. Call Kim at 617-730-2117 with questions.

**Be sure to read your weekly BEU Brief (see p.1) for updates.** The effective date for our new insurance year is July 1, 2019.

Take care...[2sheilaleach@gmail.com](mailto:2sheilaleach@gmail.com)

-Sheila Leach, PEC Rep

# FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

## MUCH ADO ABOUT FINANCES



**The PSLF Formula for Loan Forgiveness or How to Join the 1%** - At first glance, who wouldn't be discouraged from applying to a loan forgiveness program that's so "exclusive" it only accepts 1% of the applicants. That's exactly what happened when the first cohort of borrowers became eligible for PSLF in 2017. Only 1% or 99 of the approximately 28,000 borrowers who applied managed to get their loans discharged. (See MarketWatch article; <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-government-loan-forgiveness-program-has-rejected-99-of-borrowers-so-far-2018-09-20>)

Yes, the process for PSLF loan forgiveness is about as straightforward as a labyrinth and, unlike the labyrinth in Greek mythology, there's no Ariadne thread to guide you to the exit. It's an admittedly complex and confusing 10-year-long journey with an extended list of specific requirements.

I've provided a link to a more in depth discussion of the PSLF program and a comprehensive checklist of suggestions to ensure you successfully complete the 10-year journey. (<https://brookline.massteacher.org/2019/03/09/pslf/>)

**Stock Market Changes** – *Ch-ch-ch-changes, Turn and face the strange, Ch-ch-changes.* --David Bowie

While I invoked the words of Kipling and encouraged you to "keep your head when all about you are losing theirs during the stock market's steep December downturn..." While I implored you to ignore the 'daily market noise' and 'trust' in its long term prospects I, too, was unnerved by a stock market that was on pace for the worst December loss since the Great Depression. But then, there was an abrupt and unexpected change. On December 24, 2018 the market strangely and unpredictably turned positive. Fast forward to February 15, 2019 and the recently freefalling market has gained 18.77% over the past 7 seven weeks! And what might David Bowie have said to investors about "Changes?" Perhaps that market changes are often strange and, rarely predictable.

**Know Thy Credit Card Debt** – A recent released study from CreditCards.com revealed that a shocking 65% of American adults with credit card balances don't know either when or if they will ever pay off all their credit card debt. Here's the first step in addressing the problem.

- Calculate your credit card payoff – Go to the Bankrate credit card payoff calculator: <https://www.bankrate.com/calculators/credit-cards/credit-card-payoff-calculator.aspx>. Fill in your interest rate, balance, and monthly payment. The site will calculate both the number of months to pay off the loan along with the total principal and interest paid.
- Financial ignorance is not bliss – Let's take the case of a family with a \$12,000 credit card balance. If they pay \$200.00 each month with a 16% interest rate, it will take 10 years to repay the loan and repayment will include \$12,302.00 in interest, or double the original loan.

\*Next month's issue will provide a comprehensive approach to eliminating credit card debt.

*-Robert Miller, Devotion (Retired)*

### The President's Work

Whether it is in Hingham, Carver, Concord or the many other school districts in Massachusetts and around the country, a growing number of school committees and unions are working together as partners to embrace transparency in bargaining and be candid with their communities about the challenges in our schools. Since the Brookline School Committee and their attorneys seem unaware of how successful this approach is, we will be educating them about it. We believe that transparency fosters democracy, and democracy is good for schools.

*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. While the current right-wing U.S. Supreme Court has recently supported efforts to weaken unions by eliminating fair-share fees, all educators in our district benefit from the contractual protections, bargaining power, and unity of the BEU. So colleagues look to one another to keep the union strong by becoming a member and participating in the work of the union.*

### THE BROOKLINE EDUCATOR

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*Brookline Educators Union*

*115 Greenough Street*

*Brookline, MA 02445*

*Tel: 617-277-0251*

*Email: [beu-mta@hotmail.com](mailto:beu-mta@hotmail.com)*

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

*[brookline.massteacher.org](http://brookline.massteacher.org).*

*All members are encouraged to join using a personal email address.*

*Colleen Muldoon, Communications Chair*

*Jessica Wender-Shubow, President*