

“...STUDENTS FEEL CONFUSED, ANXIOUS, DISCOURAGED...”

BEU members feel a sense of urgency about sitting down as equal partners with the school committee and arriving at collective bargaining agreements. What follows is the voice of a teacher in one of our K-8 schools. The conditions she describes are not unique to her building. Nor is this teacher alone in believing that our schools are desperately in need of systemic solutions to problems being caused by current district policy and practice. Bargained

agreements can produce practices that are coherent, consistent, transparent and fair to all involved. At the end of the interview, you will find BEU proposals that can help solve problems that this teacher describes.

What examples of work by Brookline educators do you consider especially valuable and worth supporting and strengthening?

In my school, educators understand their important role in positively affecting the lives of students. They focus first on building relationships with students and understanding their needs while simultaneously trying to improve their own practice through collaboration and training. I observe my colleagues using every available moment in their day to check in with one another to strategize lessons, share feedback, and find ways to better support individual students. I am proud of the mutual respect, open communication, and professional

support that the teachers share. Educators are also working hard as advisors and supporters of groups such as GSA, ADL Peer Leaders, Climate Action, and African-American and Latino Scholars that introduce students to principles of equity and justice. Many students are thriving in this environment by feeling wholly understood, encouraged, and supported. Of course, we have more to do. Still, while staff members share a common goal--to strengthen our abilities to aid in the creation of a safe and inclusive community--we are confronted with obstacles that need to be eliminated. These obstacles are in the way of giving students opportunities to be self-expressive, develop self-esteem, and cultivate relationships through understanding and acceptance of themselves, their educators and one another. There are presently insufficient supports for building a school culture and learning environment in which students and educators can practice

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BEU CALENDAR

BEU Student Loan Debt Workshop

Apr 25, 3:10 Pierce (pg.4)

Race Reels: The Problem with Apu

May 2

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

MLK Room, BHS

Executive Board Meeting

May 6, 3:15 – 5pm

BHS, Room 258

Reps Council Meeting

May 13, 3:15 – 4:45pm

BHS, Room 020

BEU 403b Retirement Savings Workshop

May 15 3:10 Heath (pg.4)

2 KEY WAYS TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC ED!

TALK TO BROOKLINE VOTERS BY MAY 7!

Sharon Abramowitz (sharon4brookline.com) and Raul Fernandez (raulforbrookline.com) have been endorsed by the *Alliance for Brookline Schools*, of which the BEU is a part. *Voters need to hear from educators* about why our schools need new town leadership in Brookline. Please sign up to talk to voters for 2 hours (or to help in other ways).

BE AT THE STATE HOUSE ON MAY 16!

This is our *Red for Ed* moment in Massachusetts! Thanks to the “Fund Our Future” coalition, there is a once in a generation opportunity to properly fund school districts--especially those that educate predominantly low income students and students of color -- and without punitive controls. *Be there after school!*

CONTRACT CORNER

YOUR PAYCHECK



GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PAYCHECKS AND PAYSTUBS

- Keep your paystubs; keep them all; keep them for a long time, at least five years. If you have direct deposit, an easy way to keep track of paystubs is to create a separate folder in your email account just for payroll.
- You can refer to the last statement of the calendar year for tax purposes—especially to know the amount of union dues deducted.
- Check each paycheck and paystub - it may be hard to remember if you have direct deposit. We know many people do not look at their paystubs, but a few minutes every two weeks is well worth the effort. *Checking your paystub is the same as counting change from a store, but the stakes are much higher.*
- You should carefully examine your paystub whenever your net pay changes.
- You receive 21 paychecks per school year (except paras in 12 month positions, who receive 52). You should receive 20, 21 or 22 paychecks per calendar year, but usually 21.
- Being sure you are paid correctly is your responsibility. If you are underpaid, the District has no obligation to make up the difference beyond the grievance timeline of 30 days; we often are able to reach back to the beginning of a school year, but there is no guaran-

tee. If you are overpaid, you will be obligated to pay it all back – going as far back as the District wants. Of course, this isn't fair, but that's how the law works.

If you have a problem or question contact the payroll department first. If you need further help, please make a copy of your paycheck and attach a question or description of the problem and send an email to, beu-mta@hotmail.com

TAXES

Did you notice a bit extra in your paycheck starting in January? Did you notice that you might have paid a bit more in 2018 taxes? You may want to change the amount of federal and state taxes withheld. All you need to do is fill out forms W-4 (federal) and M-4 (state). You would do this so that your taxes withheld closely match the taxes due at the end of the year. Note: Medicare Tax is required for everyone hired after April 1, 1986.

Grievance Team Members:

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 Maclver (Runkle)
David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)
Sue Zobel (Lincoln)
Jessica Wender-Shubow

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mutual respect using guidelines that are clear and consistent.

Please describe what is getting in the way of creating promising approaches that meet student needs day to day.

There are three areas of concern that are posing challenges to the success of student learning in the classrooms and establishing a safe and inclusive community, with the third being of greatest concern. The concerns center on: 1) critical communication problems, 2) an imbalance between new work requirements and instructional time in the classroom, and finally, 3) extreme confusion around behav-

ior expectations and consequences. There has been a substantial increase in data entry requirements for teachers that are in addition and unrelated to data on academic progress. This data collection is more related to behavior tracking. These new tasks are mandated, but with no sense of how long the generation of such data will go on and how it helps. Seemingly endless data collection and submission are clogging up teachers' prep periods, after school time, and even instructional time.

Additionally, there is mass confusion around school-wide behavior expectations while at the same time there is minimal crisis intervention support. Students no longer know what's al-

lowed and what is not and teachers, who are also unclear, enforce discipline inconsistently. There is an increasing aversion to discipline and yet no effective alternative. Not only are minor issues like chronic tardies, chewing gum, wearing hoods and hats being enforced differently per classroom, but more severe issues like profanity, inappropriate conversations, meanness, and bullying are also both extremely prevalent as well as addressed inconsistently, if at all. What's heartbreaking is that students have now accepted this harmful environment as the new norm. When one student has chosen to be as disruptive as possible by swearing, speaking

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aggressively, shouting over the teacher, damaging or throwing objects, no others can learn.

Teachers use every educational and behavioral strategy available but these are ineffective when a student has a deeper emotional need. Tension sets in and students feel confused, anxious, discouraged, bored at the stalled learning, and worried they will become a target for bullying. The teachers are spending too much time tracking incidents, entering data, and trying to establish a feeling of safety in an unpredictable and unstable classroom. Day in and day out, they are shoveling against the tide. Over time, students begin to hate school. They feel it is unfair and that they stand powerless.

What is frustrating educators in their efforts to solve the problems you are describing?

Teachers are not given an open forum to discuss concerns staff-wide and to conceive of solutions that are then put into action. With instability in the classrooms and excessive data entry requirements, teachers can no longer devote time to improving and expanding their programs. Collaboration and integration of programming are reduced as a result.

Teachers feel abandoned in the classroom in the absence of coherent and consistent crisis intervention policies and procedures that work. Most importantly, teachers, who are experienced, devoted, and reflective are too often being looked at as being the reason that the classrooms are unstable, rather than being credited with having the courage to name the drastic changes that have been imposed over the last few years. It is teachers who are the one constant in this equation. Their understanding and proposals should carry weight.

RELEVANT BEU PROPOSALS

School Community Building & Education of the Whole Child

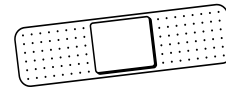
- Bargain Restorative Culture practices (including due process) & social and emotional learning time
- Realistic scheduling: meeting and PD blocks in addition to preps (without increased student loads), limits on meetings (in school and after)
- Limit standardized testing
- Increase recess, art, music
- Time for discussion of BEU concerns

Realistic Staffing

- Caseload and special case intensity assessment and triggered real-time remedies to ineffective crisis intervention
- FTE workload formulas, including class size caps
- 4 class limit for grades 6-12
- Dignity for paraprofessionals
- Increase staff for building monitoring



OUR HEALTHCARE



By now you should have received your new GIC Municipal Benefits Decision Guide and a separate letter from Brookline Human Resources (HR) that explains insurance costs and enrollment information. GIC Open Enrollment has started and ends May 1, 2019. Any additions or changes to your healthcare must be submitted to HR by the firm May 1st deadline. If you are satisfied with your current health, dental and/or life insurance coverage, you do not have to take any action during open enrollment. It is important to read pages 2 and 3 of the new Benefits Guide for the few changes that were made for this new year (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020). Open Enrollment is also the time that active members can sign up/renew the Flexible Spending Account. This account lets you set aside a portion of your paycheck TAX FREE to pay for certain health and dependent care expenses. No tax on your contribution saves you money.

Brookline also has a Healthcare Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA). Copay reimbursements are given for some inpatient and outpatient procedures, ER visits, and High-tech Imaging. The HRA is money already set aside by the Town to help pay these specific copays.

Page 14 in the Benefits Guide lists the many GIC Benefits Fairs across the state. Every insurance carrier in the GIC is represented at each Fair to answer questions and provide more information, if needed, for their specific plans.

Please don't hesitate to ask questions.
Take care....2sheilaleach@gmail.com

-Sheila Leach, PEC Rep

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

MUCH ADO ABOUT FINANCES



A Guided Tour to the PSLF Promised Land – I recently wrote about the disheartening statistics for the Public Student Loan Forgiveness Program where 99% of applicants were rejected for loan forgiveness. The PSLF program — launched in 2007 — promised borrowers working full-time in a public sector job the opportunity to get the balance of their loans discharged after 10 years of “qualifying” payments. In 2017, when the first cohort of borrowers became eligible, the shock was that only 96 borrowers or 1% were approved, an acceptance rate even more selective than the Ivies.

While I would be the first to submit that the PSLF program is riddled with vagaries, uninformed loan servicers and, in some cases, servicers who both misrepresent and actually steer borrowers away from the PSLF, borrowers should not overlook the potential promise of the PSLF. In fact, I'd like to appropriate the role of Moses for a moment and offer you the guidance, including a step-by-step plan that will significantly increase your chances of reaching the PSLF Promised Land.

PSLF Promised Land Meeting: Thursday, April 25, 3:10 pm at the Pierce School; if you have questions and the patience and perseverance, I have the answers and the commitment to deliver you out of the Student Loan Wilderness.

“Interest on Debt Grows without Rain” - I was reminded of this Yiddish proverb while meeting with an educator to discuss her student loans. In the process, she casually mentioned her credit card debt of approximately \$6,000 or close to the average for an American household. In her case, due in a large part to her onerous student loan debt, she was making minimum payments.

The Case for Not Paying the Minimum – In her situation, I gently pointed out that paying \$120.00 per month, or the 2% minimum, results in a debt of \$6,000.00 at 16.86% being paid off in 8 years. In the process she will pay \$4,427.00 in interest or \$10,427.00.

The Case for Paying a Bit More – If she adds a mere \$20.00 to the loan payment each week over the year, or the cost of not eating out for lunch twice a week, the loan payoff time is cut in half by 4 years, and she saves \$2,656.00. (This savings could be directed to the loan repayments!)

403b Workshop at Heath School – The next 403b enrollment workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, May 15, 3:10 pm at the Heath School. Bring your laptop and give some thought to how much money you can afford to invest for each paycheck. You might also want to preview the Fidelity 403 website to prepare for the enrollment session: <https://nbacctopen.fidelity.com/>

-Robert Miller, Devotion (Retired)

The President's Work

A group of our students from grades 7-9 are co-researchers in a Youth Participatory Action Research Project they have named “Students Against Standardization in Schools.” (SASS). Parents, administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals can support the project by volunteering for a 30-minute interview. Please email SASSBrookline@gmail.com

BEU educators are also campaigning with the *Alliance for Brookline Schools* in the lead-up to the May 7 town election. Please sign up at Sharon4Brookline.com

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

brookline.massteacher.org.

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

Colleen Muldoon, Communications Chair

Jessica Wender-Shubow, President