

STUDENTS HIT “ONE SIZE FITS ALL” SCHOOLING

Last fall, a racially and gender-diverse group of Brookline students, grades 7-9, stepped into the roles of co-researchers in a participatory action research (PAR) project. They were invited to participate by a group of BEU members who learned about this practice from NYC teachers whose schools we visited to learn about their restorative justice work. Students who would otherwise be marginal-

ized have a leadership role in restorative justice practice there, and their teachers encouraged us to go back to Brookline and use PAR to let students speak for themselves about what they want and need schools to be. The Brookline students were drawn to an approach that allowed them to decide what is important to them. Invited to determine their own goals, questions, and mode of inquiry, the youth co-researchers decided that their aim was to improve our schools.

with them are unacknowledged. In the next part of the presentation, Patricia gave an overview of the approach, which is inspired by the Disability Rights Movement's idea, “Nothing About Us, Without Us, is For Us.” This premise allows the picture conveyed by the skit to emerge. It would be less apt to emerge when top-down authority tends to be reinforced if subjects of research are positioned as objects of an investigation designed from above.

BEU CALENDAR

Reps Council Meeting

October 21

3:15 – 4:45pm BHS

Grievance Team Meeting

October 28

3:15 – 5pm BHS

Meeting on Restorative Justice for Unit A Tier 1 trained BEU members

October 28

5:15 – 8:45 p.m. (w/dinner)

Student Loan

Forgiveness Workshop

October 30

3:10 Runkle School

Executive Board Meeting

November 4

3:15 – 5pm BHS

Public Forum: What kind of Superintendent do we want?

November 6

7:00-8:30pm Main Public Library

They named their group “Students Against Standardization in Schools” (SASS), and they designed an inquiry into what they called “the lived experiences of Brookline students with a ‘one size fits all’ approach to education.” On October 1, the youth co-researchers and their four adult advisors, Remy Fernandez-O’Brien, Bob Miller, Jason Murray, Jess Wender-Shubow and Professor Patricia Krueger-Henney from UMASS Boston presented their findings to members of the community at an event held at the public library.

The event captured the spirit of the project and also engaged the community members who attended in a thoughtful exploration of what our schools could be. The co-researchers began with an improvisational sketch of a classroom dominated by a single mode of teaching, one that furthermore tends to favor what the youth call “model students.” The cooperative student is allowed leeway that the non-model student is denied. Standardized tests are common and students who are not comfortable

Students then explained the steps by which they arrived at such a picture. They described their community-building, exploration of experience in our schools, “power-mapping” of the institution in which possible allies and those who would resist change were identified. The decision to do interviews of teachers, parents, and administrators was presented, along with the development of interview protocols and questions, and then a process whereby 30 interviews were completed. There was the arduous work of transcribing the interviews and then analyzing of the data. It was then time to share with the audience what the co-researchers had culled from the body of data as a sample of what they learned.

Here is some of what the youth co-researchers chose to highlight from the interviews:

6th grade student: Q: If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about our school, what would you change?

CONTRACT CORNER

FTE STATUS AND YOUR BENEFITS



Several of our BEU members have recently discovered the hard way that adjustments in their full-time-equivalent (FTE) status resulted in alterations to their benefits package that they had not foreseen.

If you find yourself in the position of having to adjust your FTE status as an employee of the Public Schools of Brookline due to a leave or any other temporary change in your full- or part-time status, it's important to check your contract to understand your contractual rights and make sure HR is upholding them. Ask them about your A Days, Sick Days, and ask if any other changes have been made. *Human Resources has communicated to the BEU that they will not reach out to individual employees to fill them in on such changes.* Changes to your benefits package can have important ramifications for your ability to properly budget your time and money, and in some cases, can impact your retirement status.

As a full-time Unit A (teacher contract) employee in Brookline, you are entitled to 4 Administrative Leave Days ("A" Days—these are personal days; they convert to sick days if unused) and 11 Sick Days each year (the 12th is placed in the Sick Leave Bank). They are allotted once the school year begins (or when you return from leave). Unused sick days roll over from year-to-year.

Article 5 of the Contract discusses various leaves

of absence in much greater detail, including leave taken under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). FMLA leave allows for up to 60 work days per 12 month cycle and is granted to employees with 0.5 FTE or greater after they have worked for at least a year. Your benefits cannot be reduced nor your absence be considered a "break in service" while you are on FMLA leave. However, this might not be the case with other leaves.

The bottom line: be sure to contact Human Resources to see how they are adjusting your time and benefits. We urge you to stay informed! Download a copy of the contract or reach out to your school's BEU Rep with questions.

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, retired)
Kathy Hitchcock (BHS)
Melissa London (Pierce)
Anna MacIver (Runkle)
Pamela Penwarden (Baker)
Jill Sifantus (BJS, retired)
David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)
Jessica Wender-Shubow

LONG TERM DISABILITY INSURANCE

OPEN ENROLLMENT

The Brookline Educators Union announces a special open enrollment period for our group Long Term Disability program with Sun Life. This open enrollment will take place from now through Wednesday, November 27th. Our Long Term Disability program is designed to pay monetary benefits (60% of your salary tax free) for extended periods of time (to age 65 or beyond) when an injury or illness prevents you from earning an income. In essence, it is income replacement insurance.

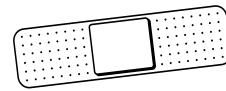
Employees that sign up for the program during this special open enrollment period may do so on a guaranteed issue basis. This period is very important as employees can enroll in the program without having to complete a medical evidence of insurability questionnaire.

If you have any questions about our LTD plan, please feel free to contact our consultant at Mosse & Mosse, Brian Fitzgerald, at 781-342-1198 or brf@mosseservices.com. He will be happy to go over the program with you in more detail and answer any questions you may have.

The deadline for this open enrollment is Wednesday, November 27th. All forms can be either faxed to Brian's attention at 781-224-1724 or you may scan and email them to his attention at brf@mosseservices.com. Find the enrollment packet and form at brookline.massteacher.org.



OUR HEALTHCARE



The Public Employees Committee (PEC) and the Town of Brookline continue to meet regularly to review, revise, and negotiate our healthcare agreement. The PEC represents all educators, firefighters, police, engineers, other town employees, and retirees. Jess Wender-Shubow and I represent you on this Committee.

We have a deadline of December 1, 2019 to let the GIC know about our renewal plans. If we continue with the GIC, that would give us a minimum two year healthcare agreement through June 30, 2022. The PEC and the Town have hired a well-known expert consultant, Pat Haraden, to help us with all the current data on the healthcare front.

Keep in mind the following important aspects of our current healthcare agreement:

We still have a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) which covers some of the copay amounts for specific medical procedures.

Active employees are eligible for BEU sponsored Long Term Disability Insurance. (See page 2)

Navigating health plans can sometimes be a daunting task. Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or concerns.

Take care.

2sheilaleach@gmail.com

-Sheila Leach, PEC Rep

continued from page 1

A: Make everything that's happened in this school be able to be seen, to the public...to the world. Then every single person could see what kids go through here, on a day to day basis.

Paraprofessional: I felt very strange because I was one of the only black kids in my grade that wasn't in METCO so whenthere was a METCO meeting or something like that, I'd kind of be like, where did everybody go? I felt like in between.

Middle school students: Q: How do you feel when you are in school?

A1: Hot (we don't have air conditioning). Bored.

A2: Teachers don't really check in with students. They don't ask students: how do you prefer this to be done? There are a lot of assumptions about students about how we learn. If one kid says, "I am good," the teachers assumes everyone else is good too.

Student: Q. Do definitions of a model student change with racial designations?

A. Uhh. I think it might be easier, actually, to be perceived as a model student if, um,if you're a person of color, especially if you're latino or black because, unfortunately, the expectations of people like us are already kinda low, so, like, you can be perceived as a model student even

if you know you're not up to standard, if you just kinda like do what you know the teachers will respond to as opposed to, like, Asian or white kids that probably have to work a little bit harder to compete with, like, the standards that are set for them.

High school teacher: Q. Which gender do you think it most affects either positively or negatively by one-size-fits-all? Um, and then why or why not?

A. Yup. I think it definitely negatively affects male students. I really do. Cause I feel like they're all, like, I think, like, their maturity is lower, but I think they just have so much more energy at this stage and, like, they don't want to sit down and be, like, talked to for 45 minutes over and over and over all day. Like, and I think that behavior.. like, that need to move -- tends to negatively affect them in terms of reinforcement in the classroom.

After community members heard from the co-researchers, they addressed the following question in small groups: "What needs to be done?" Here is some of what they wrote:

Community members in the classroom ... let students choose curriculum ... alternative ways to express what you know ... real world /experiential learning ... elevate voices of students; they are experts in good instruction ... too much stress on achievement, not creative exploration... more movement breaks ... good citizens, not model stu-

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

MUCH ADO ABOUT FINANCES



Don't Ignore Your Student Debt! Take Control of it! Make a Plan!
(By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail. - Benjamin Franklin)

I'd like to alleviate all your fears about paying back burdensome student loans by reassuring you that Bernie and Elizabeth's loan forgiveness proposals are a fait accompli. I'd also like to tell you to exhale, focus on your noble career as an educator and place the student loans on the backburner for a couple of years. Unfortunately that would not only be a mistake, but a missed opportunity to eliminate your student debt and take control of your financial destiny.

The good news is that the BEU is committed to providing its members with the tools, resources and training to help you successfully navigate the student loan repayment labyrinth.

- Interested in the Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) - Most educators are eligible for this 10 year loan forgiveness program. The BEU will sponsor regular loan forgiveness workshops throughout the year at different schools. (See calendar on page 1 and below)
- Interested in Refinancing your High Interest Rate Private Loan – I recently guided two educators through a refinancing with SoFi that reduced their interest rate from 7.6% to 4.5%. In the one case, the educator will save almost \$9,000 over 7 years!

The key to eliminating your burdensome, anxiety-causing student debt is to prepare and plan! The second PSLF meeting for this year is scheduled for 3:10 pm on Wednesday, October 30 at the Runkle School.

Don't Ignore Your 403b Retirement Savings Plan! Enroll and Invest for Your Future!

(A 26 year old teacher who invests \$100.00 each paycheck for the next 36 years will amass over \$400,000 by retirement at age 62 assuming a 10% rate of return.)

- A 403b is a retirement savings plan available to employees of educational institutions and non-profits.
- Contributions are made on a pre-tax basis. (If you earn 70k and contribute 10k, you only pay taxes on 60k, annually saving you almost \$2,000 in taxes.)
- Your returns, including dividends and capital gains, compound tax-free until 70.5.
- The contribution limit is \$19,000.
- It provides an excellent supplemental income stream in retirement and a back-up for those educators who decide to leave the profession early.

The BEU sponsors regular 403b enrollment meetings throughout the year where teachers are presented with high quality, low-fee mutual fund investment options from companies like Fidelity, Vanguard and T. Rowe Price. The second enrollment meeting is scheduled for 3:10 pm on Wednesday, November 13 at the Lincoln School.

Bob Miller, BEU Financial Consultant: odysseus7@comcast.net

-Robert Miller, Devotion (Retired)

The President's Work

- All members are invited to join Jess and Bob at an MTA Bargaining Summit, October 26. Hear about Bargaining for the Common Good, including racial justice. Email Jess.
- November 6, 7:00-8:30pm: Community Forum sponsored by the Alliance for Brookline Schools. What values and goals do you want the search committee to take seriously in choosing a superintendent?
- November 15: Dept. of Labor Relations hearing on the district's failure to bargain in good faith over Instructional Leadership Teams.
- November 19: Save the date for contract action.

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