

BROOKLINE EDUCATORS DECRY UNDERMINING OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, FILE CHARGE AGAINST SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Brookline Educators Union filed an unfair labor practice charge against the School Committee with the state's Department of Labor Relations on Thu. Dec. 5 accusing school administrators of dealing directly with union members on matters subject to contract bargaining, which is illegal under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 150E.

Since February, the School Committee has refused to negotiate with the union's negotiations team when it includes silent union representatives. The purpose of having silent representatives is to help the core team during caucuses and engage other union members in the entire process. While a negotiations session has now been scheduled for December 16, it is unclear whether the School Committee will engage with the union's full team,

including silent representatives.

Circumventing negotiations with the union's chosen team, the School Committee instead contacted educators directly and encouraged them to tacitly support the employer's claim that the school budget needs to be cut. The educators were encouraged to attend school meetings on the topic and recommend which cuts to make.

"This is an egregious undermining of collective bargaining and interference in how we conduct our business," said Eric Shiff, BHS Guidance Counselor and BEU Negotiations Chair.

At a November 14 School Committee meeting, the Superintendent announced a budget crisis that he argued was primarily driven by inade-

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DEDHAM UNION LEADERS MEET WITH THE BEU AS UNION PREPARES FOR DECEMBER 16 NEGOTIATIONS

Dedham Education Association (DEA) Negotiations Chair, Rachel Dudley, and Amy Lydon, chair of their Contract Action Team (CAT) sat down with the BEU Reps Council and other members on Dec. 9 to discuss the campaign that won a strong contract for Dedham teachers. BEU members were riveted as the two leaders told their story of solidarity among Dedham educators and from supporters from around the state and country.

On Friday, October 25, the Dedham union went on strike after 2 years of unsuccessful negotiations. It was the first educators strike in the state in 12 years. By the end of the weekend, they had a contract. Dudley, the daughter of 2 Michigan educator union leaders, quoted her mom as saying, "You guys threw a really good strike: quick and fun." Recalled Lydon, "so many of us came up and said it was the best day of our lives. I put it up there with having children." Hundreds of Dedham families and educators from around the state showed up in solidarity on the Saturday after schools shut down. Messages of support rolled in from around the country. Among the supporters were 50 Newton educators who settled their own stalled contracts just a few weeks later after WBUR reported that they were "'having conversations' about their own possible strike." It has become clear that communities are trusting public school educators and their bargaining proposals. "We had so much food sent to us," Dudley noted, "that we had to donate it to a food pantry."

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BEU CALENDAR

Grievance Team Meeting
December 16
3:15 – 5pm BHS

Negotiations Session
December 16
5:30 p.m. Town Hall
RSVP to BEU-MTA@hotmail.com

Executive Board Meeting
January 6
3:15 – 5pm BHS

Negotiations Session
December 16
5:30 p.m. Town Hall
Please RSVP BEU-MTA@hotmail.com

Negotiations Session
January 7
Details TBA



CONTRACT CORNER: DATES

Dear Contract Corner,

I know there are some deadlines in the contract that I have to follow for stuff like lane changes, but I always forget. Is there some sort of "cheat sheet"?

Dated at Driscoll

Dear Dated,

Why, yes, and here it is!

For lane changes:

Alert the Superintendent by email by January 15 if you're planning to change lanes in the salary schedule (for the following September). This is even if you haven't earned all the credits yet—you can apply for the lane change in January and finish up your credits the following spring and summer! You'll need to provide transcripts of all your credits, but the most important step is to send that email by January 15.

For child-rearing leaves of absence:

For new parents with professional status, you can get up to two years of leave without pay. You need to request this leave (a) at least five months before the new baby is due to arrive, or (b) in the case of adoption, after the home study has been completed and notarized. If you want to extend a child-rearing leave for a second year, notice is due by Feb. 1, or if there are extenuating circumstances, by Mar 15.

These leaves are a little complicated, so be sure to get in touch with BEU President, Jessica Wender-Shubow as soon as you start thinking about this, or any childbearing leave!

Those "February Letters" for Pre-PTS teachers

The contract on educator evaluation contains a provision for Pre-professional status teachers to receive a February letter indicating

that they are at risk of being non-renewed. The BEU has found that these letters create anxiety while providing no added due process protections. We are seeking an agreement to end their use. A proper evaluation should include clear info about one's standing all along in the process. Watch for updates on this issue.

Grievance Team Members:

Deb Allen (Devotion, retired)
Alisa Conner (BHS)
Jody Curran (Driscoll, retired)
Hillary Golden (Lincoln)
Mark Goldner (Heath)
Rich Gorman (BHS)
Noah Gronland-Jacob (BHS)
Jen Hanaghan (BHS)
Cathy Heller (BHS)
Kathy Hitchcock (BHS)
Melissa London (Pierce)
Anna MacIver (Runkle)
Pamela Penwarden (Baker)
Jill Sifantus (BHS, Retired)
David Weinstein (Pierce, retired)
Sue Zobel (Lincoln)
Jessica Wender-Shubow

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quate funding from the Town and the cost of union labor. He claimed the district needs to cut \$2.5 million from the school department's budget to balance this year's budget and would cut \$3.5 million from the FY 2021 budget. In the presentation, the district-level administrators insinuated that salary proposals in the BEU's bargaining proposal would exacerbate the situation and require deep cuts in personnel and classroom-level programming.

BEU President, Jessica Wender-Shubow called the request for educators to name which work and jobs of their colleagues to cut "completely inappropriate. The BEU speaks in a unified voice to protect the rights and interests of every member of our bargaining units."

Wender-Shubow added, "We welcome opportunities to exchange serious proposals with the School Committee about what priorities should be.

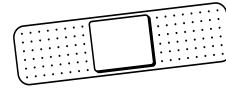
Why is it that district leaders say they want to hear from Brookline educators only when the conversation takes place without the union and only when senior administrators control the message and the agenda?"

She noted that Town Meeting members approved a School Department budget in May that would have paid for the wages proposed by the BEU without cutting what is most vital in education, direct work with children.

Negotiations Chair, Schiff said, "The BEU looks forward to bargaining over what will defend and strengthen the schools our community has long supported and that our students deserve. These unfair, inappropriate, and illegal distractions only serve to prevent the important work of settling a fair contract."



OUR HEALTHCARE



Our current healthcare agreement with the GIC expires June 30, 2020. The PEC (Public Employees Committee) will be bargaining a new agreement with the Town of Brookline early in the new year. We have been agreeing to two-year contracts lately, mostly because of the rapid changes in the healthcare system. We want to provide the best options out there for our membership in a timely fashion. As an example, Tufts Health Plan and Harvard Pilgrim Health Plan are planning to merge in the near future. Even if that merger happened before our current plan expires, the two companies have assured the GIC that we won't face any short-term disruption in benefits.

Please don't forget about the reimbursements (HRA) for certain medical copays—ER, Out-patient Surgery, In-patient Hospital Admission and High-Tech Imaging. If you pay out of your own pocket or use your Benny Card then YOU are paying. If you use the HRA, then the Town pays a portion, if not all, of your copay. You need to file for this reimbursement within 60 days of the billing date.

Please feel free to contact me or Jessica Wender-Shubow. We represent you on the PEC. We welcome your input and questions.

Take care,
2sheilaleach@gmail.com

-Sheila Leach, PEC Rep

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HOW DID THEY GET THERE?

After Lydon's brother, a Brookline educator, told her about the Brookline superintendent's powerpoint blaming educator salaries and the town for school budget woes, she speculated that local superintendents must be strategizing together. "We had one of those powerpoints, too! It's the same playbook," she reported. "They thought it would scare us out of asking for a raise, but everything shook out fine in the end." The money was found. "We had decided that it was time to break the 2% mold," Dudley explained.

The Dedham educators were completely united, BEU members learned. "The superintendent was an outsider. But we had the relationships. Not one [mid-level] administrator crossed the line." The other side kept "assuring us that we were their number one priority" but their behavior and positions spoke otherwise. They were "not friendly or open from the start. There was a sense that it was going to take drastic steps."

Efforts to weaken the union and to

pit members against one another just strengthened the resolve of the DEA members, reported the leaders. DEA members were told the district was negotiating behind the scenes when they weren't. They saw through packets that appeared at a school during a visit by the superintendent that disparaged the union president, Tim Dwyer, quoting his writing and asking, "It this the kind of guy you want representing you?" When the district served union leaders with an injunction in the middle of the school day, a tactic that seemed designed to instill fear, instead, it "really riled people up!" *Union membership increased by 10%.*

WHAT DID THEY GAIN?

In everything we heard there is evidence of Dedham educators deepening their self respect, their respect for one another, and their commitment to what their students need as they stood together to fight for dignity and respect on the job and for the idea, "You don't ask for more time without more money."

Winning a strong sexual harassment policy -- one that included the right to grieve investigations -- rose to

the top of their priorities list. Their negotiating team of core speaking representatives and silent representatives heard the district's lawyer emphatically say: "I will never allow this in the contract." But after the community increasingly pressed the district on how they could treat teachers this way and educators stood firm, he did.

Another key issue was added and unpaid Professional Development. "Our PD is terrible and they wanted to double it!" Dudley reported. The union turned this back.

The DEA also won a cell phone and personal device policy that gave educator concerns and professional judgment about best teaching practice in this area contractual weight.

Finally, raises were locked in ranging from 10% to 13% over the span of the agreements, which cover 4 years, including last year and this one.

More than once, Dudley and Lydon came back to a saying that became a lesson of their contract campaign: "If you are not prepared to act," DEA members came to understand, "you are not prepared to bargain." In the end, they won, and with no penalties.

FINANCE FOR EDUCATORS

FICO: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CAPSTONE



In the Roman Arch, it's all about the capstone, the critical piece that locks all the stones into position, enables the arch to bear weight and achieve "static equilibrium" where all forces are balanced. In personal finance, the capstone is your FICO score, a three digit number that determines your financial fate. Think of it as the lender's metric to gauge how much financial weight you can responsibly bear and maintain in a balanced financial existence.

What's involved in the construction of a FICO score?

- Payment history (35%): If you pay your bills on time, your score improves. Pay late, and —no surprise—your score suffers.
- Credit utilization rate (30%): It's all about ratios. If you have a \$1,000 credit limit, you need to keep your spending below \$300.00, a 3 to 10 ratio.
- Length of credit history (15%): The longer the better!
- New credit card accounts (10%): Avoid opening or closing accounts.
- Credit mix (10%): Credit variety is a plus. Your borrowing should include different types of loans including car, a no-interest appliance loan or a mortgage.

Why your FICO score carries a lot of weight?

A "Very Good," in the 740-799 range, opens up the gateway to the best credit rates from all lenders. You will be given access to the lowest interest rates on automobile loans, mortgages, insurance rates and yes, low interest rates to refinance your student loans!

How to raise your FICO score:

First and foremost, and as long as you're willing to be patient – between 6 months and a year - and strictly follow a plan, this is an infinitely achievable goal for anyone:

- Place all bill payments on automatic
- Strictly adhere to the 30% credit card utilization rate, use your card at least 3 times each month and Never Carry a Balance. (Set up a balance alert with your bank)
- Utilize "Experian Boost" – Leverage your automatic phone and utility payments for 15-20 easy points; all you need to do is contact Experian
- "Ultra FICO" – Much like "Experian Boost," this strategy involves leveraging another layer of your financial history. Simply "opt in," permitting FICO access to your checking and savings account history: <https://www.fico.com/en/products/ultrafico-score>

How about refinancing a predatory, 11.875% Sallie Mae loan and replacing it with a 4.9% SoFi loan? While it took over 6 months to rebuild this individual's credit score, the capstone was finally placed when the borrower managed to elevate her FICO score from 660 to 740. This hard earned financial outcome will now enable the borrower to comfortably bear the weight of her student loans and equally important enjoy a balanced personal and financial life.

-Robert Miller, Devotion (Retired)

The President's Work

While the Negotiations Team is preparing to meet the School Committee across the table on Dec. 16 and Jan. 7, a negotiations subcommittee will be bargaining Instructional Leadership Teams and their impact on the jobs of others in sessions on Dec. 19 and Jan. 9. This is exciting work. The aim is to strengthen teacher voice in our school buildings, ensuring that teacher input is truly democratic, neither token nor a rubber stamp for predetermined plans. If you are interested in being part of this process, please email Jess at BEU-MTA@hotmail.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