

PRESS RELEASE

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BTU to Rally for Teachers' Rights January 18 at 5 PM at BPS HQ

First citywide event this contract season to build on recent surge in teacher support as BTU seeks new agreement

BOSTON – On January 18, 2012 at 5 PM, every public school in the Boston Public School system will be involved in a rally for teachers' rights as members of the Boston Teachers Union (www.btu.org) seek a new contract. The rally will take place at a School Committee meeting at 26 Court Street in Boston, which is the headquarters of the Boston Public Schools. After the rally, BTU members will gather at The Black Rose In Faneuil Hall from 7-8:30 to discuss and plan for further action and events.

The event, which is the first of its kind for the new contract season, is intended to build on the surge of energy and interest that was demonstrated by the school-by-school event that took place on November 18, 2011 in which over 4,000 teachers and BPS employees took part.

Local and state representatives, including Steve Tolman and members of the Boston City Council have been invited to speak at the rally.

BTU teachers have been trying to negotiate a new contract since June of 2010 and have often struggled to get the attention and respect of the school department and even of parents and other stakeholders. In the last 19 months, there have been over 40 negotiation sessions involving members of the BTU. While some progress has been made, especially in the realms of teacher and para-professional staffing, much remains to be done and the BTU has been striving to garner attention and support, especially around such issues as the length of the school day, professional opportunities, expanding career growth, revamping and improving delivery of service, class size and salary.

Despite the fact that the district's latest offer (presented December 15, 2011) moves the district in "the wrong direction," according to BTU President Richard Stutman, BTU members have been willing to make significant concessions, including agreeing to extend the school day up to three hours. Despite the BTU's efforts to work with the district, Superintendent Carol Johnson has only appeared

at one session and the city has made only one contract offer in nearly two years. BTU administrators hope that this rally will promote further progress during the five more negotiating sessions that are scheduled for the next six weeks.

“We try to be thoughtful and consistent,” Stutman says, “yet the district appears to be anything but—just interested in getting more and more out of us without any thought and deliberation going into the process.”

Stutman hopes that this rally will help bring more attention to the plight of the BTU and help turn the tide towards productive progress.

“There are newly-issued state regulations on performance evaluation that provide guidelines under which all teachers and districts in Massachusetts must operate,” Stutman notes. “Both the BTU and the district have to work within these boundaries as we try to construct a performance evaluation system that will improve instruction. At the end of the day we want a system that is fair, collaborative and instructive.”

So far, however, Stutman suggests that the current situation is anything but.

“The document and the regulations contain dozens of pages and include untried elements of using student test data and other new concepts,” Stutman points out, citing a passage in the latest proposal that states, “Teachers shall be responsible for familiarizing themselves with the evaluation instrument and process.”

“That’s it,” Stutman says. “We’re on our own.”

In its continuing efforts to support members, BTU has also planned a series of community meetings in February for members of the union and of the community. The union has also hired a billboard truck to carry its message throughout the city for a full week.

“We invite city residents to participate in a forum about the direction of negotiations and how we can improve our schools,” Stutman explains, noting that the February meetings will be held in all neighborhood libraries and that more information can be found at www.btu.org.

“Obtaining a contract that is good for students, affordable for the city, and fair to our members is everyone’s issue.,” Stutman says. “We cannot leave this to someone else.”

The Boston Teachers Union represents 5,500 teachers and other professionals including nurses, psychologists, and guidance counselors. In addition, we represent approximately 1,000 paraprofessionals, and close to 500 substitute teachers. It is the largest public sector labor local in New England.

