



Boston Union Teacher

The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union

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Many Roads to School Improvement

(Ed. note: The following column was submitted to the Boston Globe for publication.)

By Richard Stutman
President, Boston Teachers Union

The people who spend every hour of their working day in a Boston public school would like to offer a reminder to those who haven't seen the inside of a classroom since they played "Principal for a Day": Boston Public School teachers and staff have a lot to be proud of these days, and it's not just successful pilot schools.

Last year, our school system won the prestigious Broad Prize, the Super Bowl for urban excellence in education. We placed first among the 100 largest and most economically disadvantaged urban school systems in the country. Boston public school teachers, staff, and administrators are rightly proud of the award and the hard work that it recognizes.

The award specifically highlighted the union's flexibility in hiring new teachers, new teacher mentoring programs, and a commitment to transform all large district high schools to small learning communities.

Teacher turnover, particularly in urban schools, is a national crisis. Nearly 60 percent of new teachers in urban schools leave within the first five years. Boston is a national model for attracting and retaining the best teachers because the union, school administrators and the Mayor have made it a priority.

That said, members of the Boston Teachers Union are not satisfied, and never will be, until each child reaches proficiency. This is why our members find it so frustrating when part-time school observers reduce the entirety of the improvement process to the rate of conversion of traditional schools to pilot schools. Frankly, it's a simplistic view that demonstrates a one dimensional grasp of the complex issues facing urban schools today.

Let me set the record straight. The Boston Teachers Union (BTU) embraces the pilot school model. In fact, we are going to open up our own in 2009. We created this initiative along with the school department in 1994. In the thirteen years since, we have never wavered from, nor looked back, on our agreement.

Boston is also one of the first urban districts in Massachusetts to create Extended Learning Time (ELT) schools. While many other districts couldn't reach

an agreement on the start-up of these schools, the BTU boldly initiated three such schools out of an initial statewide group of only 10. The highly-regarded Mass 2020 just released research highlighting this new model's noteworthy results.

Last year, we negotiated an agreement to set up 10 Superintendent Schools. It's a new model that also has an extended day program. What's more, the current contract includes newly-conceived Discovery Schools – a model that we hope will extract some of the best ideas from Pilots and adapt them to other environments. A jointly-developed RFP for Discovery Schools will be out shortly.

We are actively working with Superintendent **Carol Johnson** to create a variety of different schools that will continue to pioneer best practices in the decades to come. We are excited about all these models and we rejoice that there is room for all of these, and more, in our system. We don't claim that any of the above school models are *the* answer. We do believe, however, that each is part of the solution. And we believe that pilot schools are part of the mix.

What teachers feel sensitive about, however, is the trumpeting of Pilot Schools above all other reform initiatives. It appears to us that many pilot advocates



Richard Stutman
BTU President

support this model solely because the model calls for us to surrender many of our workplace rights – rights that generations of teachers have fought to achieve.

In Boston, we are creating new and exciting schools that offer a variety of approaches. We are doing so, in great part, while honoring the collective bargaining rights of teachers. There is nothing mutually exclusive about creating models for school improvement while at the same time protecting teachers' rights and benefits.

Our union's view filters up from 7,000 members working every day in 140+ schools. Where the pilot model makes the most sense, our members support it. Where other innovations make more sense – the Discovery School model, for example – our members want and expect those. We will continue to seek out the best of new educational models, and look forward to continuing improvement and new awards for the Boston Public Schools to which we are strongly committed.

Our members welcome change, they are not afraid to take risks, and they want to see school improvement. But the change has to work, the risks must come with protections, and the improvements must be real.

BTU Rep Training Informative

By Caren Carew
Secondary Field Representative

Almost 50 BTU Reps. crowded the BTU Conference Rooms for the BTU Reps. Training Workshop on November 26, 2007. The Role of the Building Rep. is imperative to maintaining our contract rights and to making the BPS a better place for the staff and the children we care so very much about. Learning what the various components entailed in being a 'highly qualified' BTU Rep. is a very important step in realizing our goal in growing our capacity as a Union of professionals.

BTU President **Richard Stutman** welcomed the group and introduced BTU Vice President **Patrick Connolly**, who detailed the grievance process including Step 1 grievances, class size grievances, the mediation process, Step 2 & 3 grievance procedures, as well as the arbitration process. AFT President **Tom Gosnell** told his obligatory Red Sox joke and then proceeded into describing the need for COPE, the Committee on Political Education and how important political action is to upholding pub-

(continued on page 2)

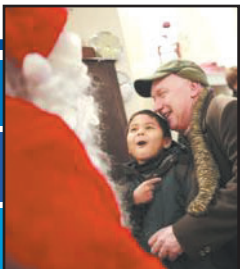
Everyone Had a Great Time at the BTU Children's Holiday Party



See more photos on page 4

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The Dimensions of an Effective School Systems 4 2

BTU Welcomes National Board Certified Teachers 5

Retirees – Still Active: Where Are They Now? 7

The Dimensions of an Effective School System: Plan Instruction and Use Strategies Effectively

(Fourth in a series.)

We are halfway through the school year and this column is halfway through examining the connections between effective teaching and the support a school system should provide to insure that our schools and classrooms are places where the children of Boston can learn to the best of their ability. This month we will look at the dimension of **Planning Instruction and Using Strategies Effectively**.

It seems fitting that I am writing this the day after Christmas. We have all had a few days to celebrate and be with our families. And I am sure today, and over the next few days, most of us will be planning lessons and units. It is important to acknowledge this because the powers that be often paint teaching as a 6-1/2 hour day and 183 day year. They tell us that four or five periods a week is sufficient to plan our instruction. There is no industrialized country in the world that gives their teachers so little time for planning. Teachers in Sweden, a country with a strong labor movement, have more than two hours extra every day to plan individually and collectively! Imagine how different our schools could be if we had this much time to plan.

Time is important when looking at the first expectation under this dimension. Teachers are expected to: *Develop lesson plans that are up-to-date, align with the*

standards, and articulate what students will know and be able to do at the end of each lesson. When done most effectively this means we are designing short- and long-term plans that are comprehensive and cohesive across the content. This takes time to do well. One of the biggest complaints of new teachers in the system is the tremendous amount of time it takes to plan lessons. We lose over 50% of these teachers in the first three years of teaching. But in the last contract negotiations the school department refused to consider the union's demand of a fifth planning and development period for elementary school teachers. That would be only an hour a week, not even close to the two hours a day extra for our Swedish brothers and sisters!

The next expectation focuses on the content of our planning. Teachers are expected to: *Focus on student understanding of essential concepts – the “big ideas” – and organize lessons so that each one builds on the previous one. (We should) show students how to connect current learning to what they already know (and) ask students to apply learning to other content areas.* Highly competent teachers design instruction to build on students' prior knowledge, background experiences, and instructional needs.

They encourage all students to think critically about the subject matter and apply learning to new situations.

Theory once again butts heads with reality. This expectation demands that teachers understand their students and creatively apply that understanding to their lessons. The reality is we are often handed a standardized curriculum that expects us to cover so much in a cursory way to prepare out students for a standardized test that often does not value the prior knowledge or background experience of the immigrant students, working class students and students of color we teach. The Boston School Committee adopted these Dimensions of Effective Teaching. It is high time that they listen to the teachers of Boston and take a stand against the use of MCAS and standardized testing to unfairly judge our students. Maybe then we will be able to create the kind of curriculum that truly values their lives and experiences.

When planning instruction teachers are expected to: *Organize the class for “workshop”: a mix of direct instruction, independent work (individually or in small groups), and time to share learning and ask questions.* They are also expected to: *Provide daily opportunities for students to speak, think, read, write, problem-solve, discuss ideas, and process their thinking*



Garret Virchick

individually and with one another. Highly effective teachers use “workshop” to introduce challenging learning experiences that develop students' independent learning, collaboration, and ability to guide their own learning. They offer students' opportunities to solve problems analyze content, and draw conclusions that consider multiple perspectives within and across subject matter.

This expectation illustrates how the art of teaching has changed. No longer should students be seen as receptacles to be filled with information. Teachers are now the facilitators of the learning process creating opportunities for students to discover learning and make sense of it in a dynamic way, rather than by simply memorizing content and regurgitating it on tests. If we are to become this type of teacher we need more than just rhetoric from the school committee. We need school budgets that include ample resources so that classrooms can truly become “workshops” of learning.

The difference between this rhetoric and reality is most evident in the teaching of science. It is the latest subject to fall prey to the MCAS monster. There are few science classrooms in the city that have the resources to create a truly “workshop” style classroom. Why? Just look at the prices in the science supply catalogues that are gathering dust in your school. As a result teachers end up spending thousands of dollars every year to provide even minimal discovery type lessons. And it's not just science. The teaching of language arts, history, mathematics and the disciplines that are disappearing like music and art are all expensive to teach if we are going to be teaching in a way that gets our students “doing” rather than simply “listening.” Even basics such as paper are in short supply in too many schools. School Committee rhetoric needs to be accompanied by realistic budgets so that we can create “workshop” classrooms.

There are four other expectations under this dimension. All of them have to do with meeting the needs of our students. We teach such a heterogeneous population of children and it is important that we: 1) Differentiate instruction, based on data, to respond to each student's learning needs, 2) Use information about students' learning styles, linguistic needs, and English Language Development levels to inform instruction, 3) Use Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to make appropriate instructional accommodations and/or modifications so that students can access the grade-level curriculum, and 4) Use technology to reach those with different learning styles.

The first three of these last expectations are complicated tasks that require a lot of support from the administrative side of the equation. Differentiating instruction requires careful observation of students and analysis of both formative

(continued on page 3)



New and Veteran Building Representatives attend BTU Workshop to learn about their roles and responsibilities.

BTU Rep. Training Informative...

(continued from page 1)

lic schools and workers rights. Elementary Field Representative **Michael McLaughlin** reviewed the Role of the Building Rep. including voting procedures. Secondary Field Representative **Caren Carew** explained the disciplinary procedures and the role of the BTU Rep. in the Investigatory Meeting Process as well as the evaluation process. The formal presentations were followed by a spirited Q&A session and refreshments.

The role of the Building Rep. is a leadership one and is both challenging and rewarding. We all need to participate in order to be well represented and to make sure the schools are the best they can be as well. Our work conditions are the children's learning conditions. We must hold the highest expectations for both.

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The opinions expressed in the *Boston Union Teacher* do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or those of its members.

WHEN WRITING:

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DEADLINE:

The Deadline for submitting articles for the February edition of the *Boston Union Teacher* is January 16th. All copy should be e-mailed to mfglynn@comcast.net and g.virchick@verizon.net. This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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Calling All Teachers of Technology

As the role of technology is expanding in the Boston Public Schools, so too is the role of the technology teacher and TST. Do you have unanswered questions about your role as the “computer expert” in your school? Do you have concerns that have gone unaddressed for more than a year?

The BTU is sponsoring a technology teacher group. This forum is designed to give people in these increasingly challenging roles an opportunity to share timely news, solutions, best practices and concerns.

As technology teacher/TST, how supported do you feel in your role(s) at the school level? What supports would you like to see that are not there for you now? How is the restructuring of tech support working for you?

What was the impact on your workload and ability to do your job when viruses attacked our system last school year? Did you feel confident that support was there when needed?

What was your experience with the move from Webmail to Exchange at the end of last school year? Were you given enough time and information for the transition to be smooth and minimally intrusive to your daily routines? If not, what can we do to assure more decisions about major changes will respect our difficult jobs and consider and support our ability to follow through?

What impact do you foresee for the new laptops in your building? At the school level, how can we be prepared for this major acquisition of new equipment?

Given that technology teachers are the first line of defense when technology breaks down (through equipment failure or gaps in personal knowledge); this group can be a support for you in your unique roles. If any of the ideas and questions strikes a common chord within your daily experience of a technology teacher consider joining those similarly situated. As a group, we can support each other through all of these challenges. If you are interested in attending please contact me, **Michael McLaughlin** at mmclaughlin@btu.org

The Dimensions of an Effective School System: Plan Instruction and Use Strategies Effectively

(continued from page 2)

and summative data. But it becomes an impossible task when our classes are overcrowded and students are assigned not by their particular needs, but because there is no place else to put them. Differentiating instruction is important but also differentiating the course offerings and kinds of classes that will better serve our students is equally important. But too often schools and school systems are being run based on a business model of efficiencies that saves the school department money, but does not meet the diverse needs of our students. One size does not fit all.

This is most apparent with the politically charged issue of English language learners. Looking at data is important. And the data shows that individuals who are literate in their own language learn a second language (English) faster. The data also shows that some students take upwards of seven years before they are ready to learn in another language. Why wasn't the School Committee championing THIS data five years ago when Question #2 (The Unz Amendment) outlawed bilingual education. The same amendment went down to defeat in more conservative Colorado because more enlightened leaders bankrolled an advertising campaign that outspent the Unz lobby by 10-1 to convince the electorate of the problems it would create. We need a vocal School Committee to stand up for our students, not simply buckle under to political expediencies.

This is equally true when it comes to the inclusion of special education students into regular education classrooms. As educators we are expected to look at individualized education plans

(IEPs) and make modifications for students with special needs. But the inclusion model that seems to be in effect in our schools is one that is there to save costs and not necessarily benefit the student. We need trained special educators co-teaching with the regular education teachers so that we can adequately modify instruction to meet the needs of our students. Unless this happens then inclusion is not inclusion at all, it is warehousing.

The last expectation under this dimension is about using technology. This isn't that complicated. It's just expensive. Our students deserve up-to-date and state of the art computers in every classroom in the city. But I'm still seeing computers that almost pre-date Bill Gates in classrooms (ok...that is a little bit of an exaggeration...but not by much).

Teachers are expected to improve their practice every year. That is what the School Committee is asking for when they adopted the Dimensions of Effective Teaching. Of course the vast majority of us have always known this and we constantly are looking to improve our practice. But as we enter 2008, a presidential election year, we need a School Committee that will stand up and demand the resources (money) from government that teachers, parents and students of the City of Boston deserve. One Dimension of an Effective School System should require its leaders to post the following objective on **THEIR** board: At the end of today's lesson all politicians and members of society will be able to understand the following: If you think education is expensive, try ignorance!

Just Ask Caren...

by Caren Carew
Secondary Field Representative



Can a teacher volunteer to teach in an inclusion class that is new to the school or is there a process to follow prior to doing so?

Teachers can't volunteer to begin an inclusion program at a school without going through the process outlined on pages 42-46 in the 2006-10 Collective Bargaining Agreement [BTU Contract] even if the administration is calling it “cooperative teaching” or some other euphemism. In the contract, inclusion's ‘definition and purpose’ “... is moving a child or children with identified special needs into a general or regular educational setting for the amount of time deemed appropriate for the child's success. To maximize student learning and effective teaching...” The Contract calls for teacher input. “Teacher members of the School Site inclusion planning team shall be chosen by the school's faculty. Each Principal/Headmaster shall notify teachers of any inclusion plan to be implemented in their school during next school year prior to February 15 [currently January 15], so that: -teachers and paraprofessionals have an opportunity to plan and prepare for its implementation, and - teachers who wish to may exercise their contractual right to excess themselves or transfer.”

The contract is very specific about staffing ratios and class size in relation to inclusion models. Much of what is currently “passing” as inclusion in many schools does not follow the dictates of the contract which was largely written by SPED teachers and related service providers in order to best meet the student's needs.

In respect to resource rooms becoming inclusion classes the contract reads, “schools which adopt an inclusion model which changes the way that resource rooms are configured or changes the way that resource room services are delivered must follow the procedures for and obtain a waiver through the School Based Management provision, referred to in [the BTU Contract Article III C (4) pgs. 24-26].” “...paraprofessional support assigned to the classes at a school will not be reduced as a result of the inclusion.” Training must be provided for teachers and paras according to the contract. “School Site inclusion planning teams shall meet with teachers [and paras] teaching in inclusion classrooms at least twice yearly to determine what training, professional development, and support are needed. The Central and Cluster Office personnel responsible for supporting inclusion shall arrange for such training to be provided.” If this is not happening, grieve it. If we want the best for our kids, then we need to demand what it will take to do so. We already have strong contract language mandating that this occur – stand up for it!

The contract continues, “No teacher shall be excessed or laid off as a result of a school-site inclusion plan. (1) Teachers who choose not to teach in an inclusion classroom may exercise their voluntary contractual right to excess themselves or to transfer. (2) Positions to be filled in inclusion classrooms shall be offered first to teachers and paras in the affected classrooms, then to others within the school according to the terms of the contract. (3) Parties which are not filled by existing school staff shall be posted on the March [currently February] transfer list and, if necessary, on the excess pool vacancy list, and on subsequent postings.” The contract continues, “(1) In no instance shall an inclusion classroom exceed the ratio of 20 [502.4] students to one teacher. The 20:1 ratio assumes a maximum of 6 [502.4] SPED students...” (2) The staffing of inclusion programs at all schools shall be in a ratio of one special education teacher when a full compliment of 502.4 students are part of the student body.”

In this column, I've touched on portions of the procedures for the inclusion model, but please refer to the actual contract language for a more comprehensive understanding of the process and its rationale. Both labor [BTU] and management [BPS] have agreed to this language concerning the inclusion process. No administrator, well intentioned or otherwise, can abridge this process. If attempts are made to do so, please contact the BTU immediately. Affected teachers should file a grievance *right away*. This inclusion process is designed with the best interest of the child in mind by calling for inclusion plans to be vetted by the school site council followed by a waiver vote of the school's BTU members requiring a 66-2/3rds vote to pass, as well as a mechanism for teachers who don't want to embrace this service delivery model to have the option of leaving the building voluntarily.

The contract also calls for common planning time for inclusion teachers, outlines the process to follow prior to assigning a student to a specific class for inclusion at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, as well as stating, “Schools are reminded that the planning process referred to [in the contract] is vital to the success of any inclusion program.”

As a permanent teacher, am I able to voluntarily excess myself from my building and go to the ‘Excess/Reassignment Pools’ in March?

The contract reads, “No teacher may voluntarily excess themselves without the approval of the director of Human Resources.” In order to attempt this, a permanent teacher must fill out the form ‘Request for Reassignment for Teachers and Paras Application’ Superintendent's Circular [attachment 2] of Human Resource (HRS-HS-7) which must be submitted on or before January 15th. The caveat on the form reads, “If there is a reduction of a permanent teaching position in my Program Area in my current school, I wish to request reassignment for the coming academic year. In the event that a vacancy occurs within my school prior to my reassignment, I understand that I will be reassigned to my current school.” This decision can't be rescinded by the teacher filling out the form after February 15th. The application asks the teacher to return the form to the Principal of their school. A teacher is welcome to do so, however, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, has stated that in order to ensure the application is received by the deadline at Court Street, the teacher may submit it directly to HR, rather than the Principal.

A teacher who received their 3rd pick in last academic year's excess pools or who did not have 3 choices available to pick from, may submit this form if they wish to be included in this year's pools, by making a prominent notation stating this info on the same application form. If a school is selected to become a Superintendent's School for the upcoming school year, a teacher may also opt out by filling out this form. If you are a permanent teacher at a pilot school the contract reads, “Employees shall work at a pilot school on a voluntary basis and may excess themselves at the end of any school year.” Pilot school teachers should also fill out the voluntary reassignment application and submit it directly to HR. Permanent pilot school teachers do **not** need approval from HR or their Principal to excess themselves.

Know your rights!

I'm fighting for you, let's stand up together! BTUnity!

Everyone Had a Great Time at the
BTU Children's Holiday Party
on Thursday, December 27, 2007

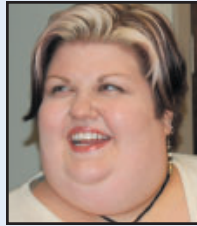
Photos by
Mary F. Glynn



BPS Welcomes Six New National Board Certified Teachers

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has awarded National Board Certified Teacher status to six new Boston Public School Teachers in the 2006-07 Cycle. On December 11, 2007, the Center for Leadership Development and the Boston Teachers Union held a celebratory reception for these teachers at the BTU Hall from 3:30-5:30 pm.

An admiring group gathered to acknowledge this impressive achievement with numerous speeches offering well-deserved accolades for the accomplishment of each of these six teachers. BTU President and Host **Richard Stutman**, BPS Superintendent **Dr. Carol Johnson** performed the ritual pinning of the new NBCT's and presentation of a floral bouquet. Also in attendance were CLD Director **George Cox**, BTU Representative **Michael McLaughlin**, NBC teachers **Ronda Goodale**, **Tom Hocker**, **Margaret Hoyt**, **Karene Hines**, **Maureen Roach** and **Yvonne Troxell**. New NBC teachers' family, friends, administrators and colleagues joined the six for an afternoon of joy and welcomed relief after an exhaustive process now behind them. Congratulations go to:



Danielle Murray

Danielle has earned National Board Certification in English Language Arts for Adolescence/Young Adulthood. Danielle teaches English Language Arts in grades 9 to 11 at Brighton High School. A teacher for seven years, Danielle also serves on the Clinical Faculty at Boston College where she supervises teachers completing their practica.



Lorraine Theroux

Lorraine has earned National Board Certification in Science for Early Adolescents. Lorraine teaches science in grades K to 5 at the Manning School. Lorraine has been teaching for 15 years.



Nora Tsoutis

Nora has earned National Board Certification in English Language Arts for Adolescence/Young Adulthood. Nora teaches English Language Arts in grades 10 and 11 at the O'Bryant School for Mathematics and Science. Nora has been teaching for seven years.



Brooke Fabian

Brooke has earned National Board Certification in English Language Arts for Adolescence/Young Adulthood. Brooke teaches English Language Arts in grades 9 to 11 at East Boston High School. A teacher for seven years, Brooke entered teaching as a career change through the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT) Program.



Cara Karra

Cara has earned National Board Certification in Science for Adolescence/Young Adulthood. Cara teaches Science at Brighton High School.



James Liou

James has earned National Board Certification in Social Studies/History for Adolescence/Young Adulthood. James teaches the Senior Capstone History Class at Boston Community Leadership Academy and has nine years of teaching experience.

NBCT's are entitled to the BTU contractual four percent pay raise, along with a reimbursement of their application fees. They also have earned the opportunity to receive nine graduate credits at an accredited college with only a nominal fee per credit. Boston applauds these teachers for earning professional recognition in a national licensure. Thanks to their successes, Boston too gets the spotlight. Their initiative and hard work place them in the forefront of BPS teacher leadership.

If you would like more information on how to apply, contact **Maggie Hoyt** at mhoyt@boston.k12.ma.us.



BTU President Richard Stutman with National Board Certified Teachers Nora Tsoutis, James Liou, BPS Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson, Brooke Fabian, Danielle Murray, Cara Karra and Lorraine Therieux.



BPS Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson pins National Board Certified Teacher Brooke Fabian.

Is Your School a Healthy School?

How healthy is the air you and your students are breathing each day? Is your school environment healthy? We need to hear from you if you hesitated in answering either of these questions.

The BTU has formed an interest group for school environmental issues. A school's environment includes but is not limited to air quality, pest control, water leakage and temperature. The interest group's mission is to create a safe and confidential forum for all BTU members to discuss school environmental issues.

We know that some schools have environmental committees and would like to help you in your efforts to make schools healthier for students and staff. Members at schools without an environmental committee are welcome too!

Do you have concerns about your school's air quality that you would like to discuss in a safe setting? Then the environmental interest group is here for you. The meetings will be held here at the BTU on February 12th, April 8th and June 9th. Please RSVP to mmclaughlin@btu.org if you can attend the next meeting.

– Michael McLaughlin, Elementary Field Rep.

THE COST OF WAR

Taxpayers in Boston, Massachusetts will pay \$938.4 million for the cost of the Iraq War through 2007.

For the same amount of money, the following could have been provided:

- 273,212 People with Health Care **OR**
- 1,463,100 Homes with Renewable Electricity **OR**
- 18,891 Public Safety Officers **OR**
- 16,172 Music and Arts Teachers **OR**
- 101,143 Scholarships for University Students **OR**
- 70 New Elementary Schools **OR**
- 3,260 Affordable Housing Units **OR**
- 341,826 Children with Health Care **OR**
- 111,555 Head Start Places for Children **OR**
- 13,902 Elementary School Teachers **OR**
- 14,103 Port Container Inspectors

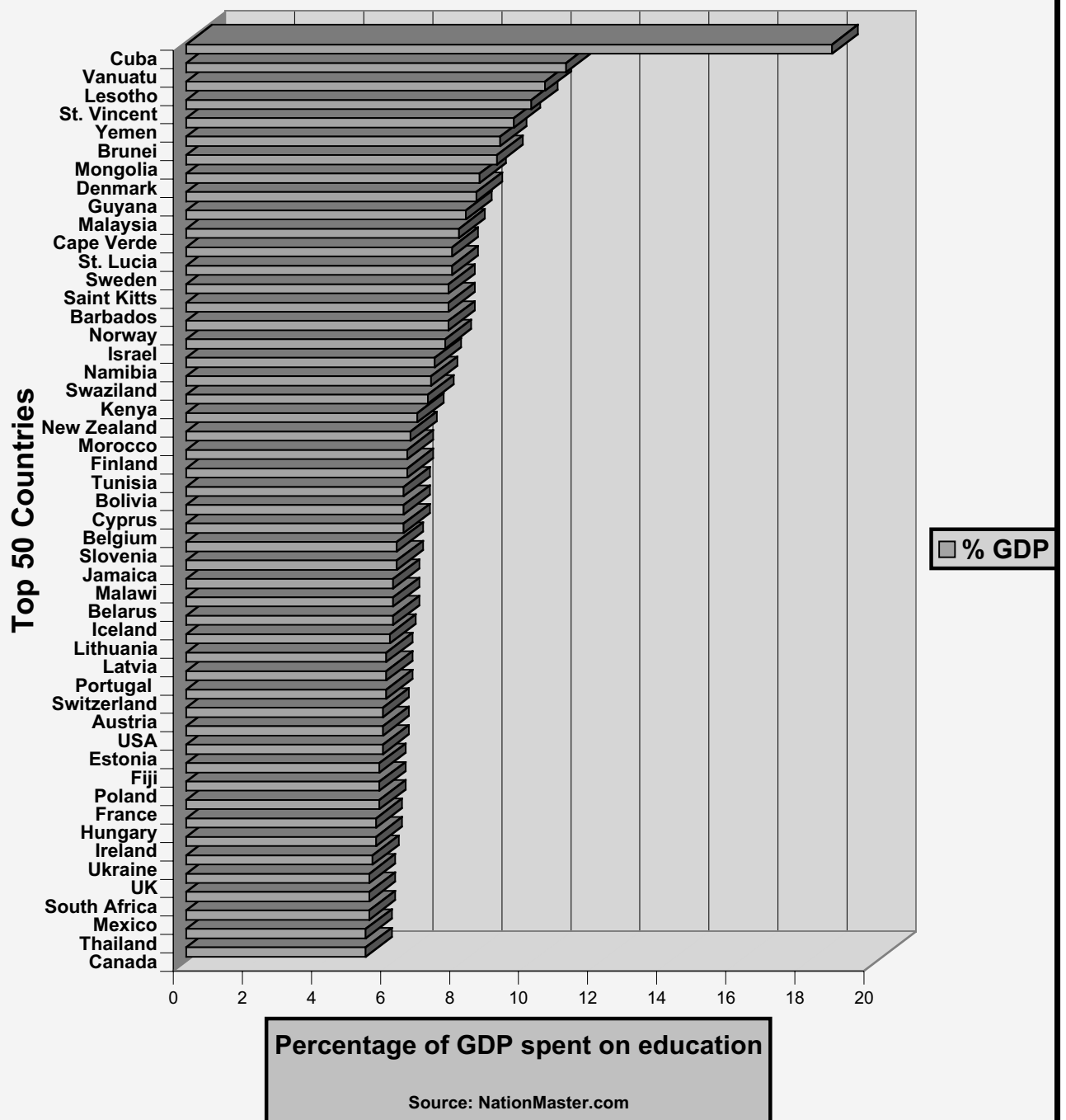
Notes and Sources

Go to Cost of War Counter

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BRING THE TROOPS HOME IN 2008!

Comparing Education Spending to Gross Domestic Product



Book Review by Betsy Drinan

“It’s Being Done – Academic Success in Unexpected Schools” by Karin Chenoweth

Think of the MCAS and compare it to a competitive 100-yard dash. This is the comparison that Paul Reville, the new Chairman of the Massachusetts State Board of Education articulated at a recent AFT Massachusetts conference. Paraphrasing, he stated that our goal as educators is for all students to cross the same finish line in relatively close proximity and yet some students get a head start – some, a significant head start – due to their formative experiences outside of school. We then have to question. When all students don’t achieve at the level we have established as proficient what is the reason? Shall we blame the so-called disadvantages of low socioeconomic status? Is it that teachers and administrators in high poverty schools hold lower expectations for their students? Is it a result of poor management, poor instruction or inequitable resource allocation? Is this a problem that can be solved by the public schools?

Karin Chenoweth, in her book “It’s Being Done – Academic Success in Unexpected Schools” provides us with evidence that indeed public, open enrollment schools with high percentages of students of poverty and students of color can achieve at levels that meet and exceed those of their peers in more affluent,

more white communities. Ms. Chenoweth, an education columnist for the *Washington Post* from 1999-2004 and also a senior writer and editor of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, worked with analysts from The Education Trust to identify these schools, visit them and describe what they were doing. The result is a fascinating book that profiles 15 of these high achieving schools across the country.

Consider the case of the M. Hall Stanton Elementary School in North Philadelphia. There are 487 students in this school. 99% are African American and 99% meet the qualification for free and reduced lunch. In 2003, 13% of Gr. 5 students scored proficient in reading on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. In 2006, 70% were proficient as compared to 32% of Philadelphia’s 5th graders and 61% of Pennsylvania overall. The results were so dramatic that officials insisted the children be tested again to verify the

results. What had happened? Philadelphia’s new citywide reading and math curriculum was a factor. The school also broke itself into three academies (K-6) and fostered a family-like atmosphere with

doll collections, stuffed animals, books and rocking chairs scattered throughout the clean, well maintained building. The team leader (a peer not a supervisor) of each academy is a literacy, math or science specialist and supports teachers’ lesson planning and instruction. There are frequent, brief student assessments. All students have individualized plans based on their assessment data and in fact, the assessment wall of the main meeting room is covered with

post-it notes readily identifying the progress of each student. There is close time management scrutiny of classroom practice so instructional time is maximized. Positive behavior incentives are in place and consistent follow through provided for children having a more difficult time. Significant, meaning-

ful professional development occurred. Chenoweth’s description of the school includes snippets of her conversations with school staff which are particularly illuminating.

Another school profiled in the book is Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School in St. Paul, Minnesota. The school has 312 students - 48% African American, 21% Asian (mostly Hmong), 14% Latino and 15% White. 92% are receiving free or reduced lunch. In 2001 the school was considered to be the worst school in St. Paul with only 17% of Gr. 5 students scoring proficient in Math. By 2005, 80% were proficient – 4% higher than Minnesota’s overall proficiency rate of 76%.

Principal Von Sheppard said the school was “like the wild, wild West” when he first arrived. A strong hand at discipline, putting an end to bullying as well as the school-wide adoption of the Responsive Classroom Behavior model dramatically altered things. There were many other changes including a decision to work with consultants from the America’s Choice comprehensive school reform project, bringing back a 20 minute daily recess and a daily ‘walk and talk’ in the gymnasium as well as challenging the

(continued on page 7)



Retired Teachers News

RTC Raffle Created to Benefit a Wide Variety of Charities and Worthy Causes

The Retired Teachers Chapter has started a new initiative to benefit a variety of charities or worthy causes.

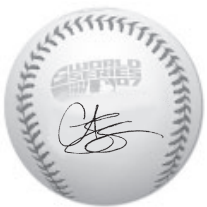
The first beneficiary of this initiative was the USO. The RTC made a \$200.00 (two hundred dollar) donation to provide holiday greetings and cheer to our military personnel serving our country in foreign lands.

We are now in the process of raising funds in the form of a Holiday Raffle to fight ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. The raffle is a joint effort by both BTU active union members and the still active members of the RTC. We are working in cooperation with the ALS Association and Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling's Pitch for ALS Program.

The prize for this raffle is a **2007 World Series Baseball personally autographed by Curt Schilling.**

Tickets for this raffle are \$5.00 a piece, or 5 for \$20.00. If you would like to help the RTC reach its goal, you can fill out the raffle ticket below and mail it to BTU/RTC at 180 Mount Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125 along with a check made out to the ALS Association. Additional tickets may be purchased at the BTU/RTC Offices.

Buy an RTC RAFFLE TICKET for \$5.00 each or 5 for \$20.00 to benefit the ALS Association



WIN A 2007
WORLD SERIES
BASEBALL
AUTOGRAPHED BY
RED SOX PITCHER
CURT SCHILLING

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone (____) _____

Cell Phone(____) _____

One ticket @ \$5.00 ea. Five tickets @ \$20.00

Book Review...

(continued from page 6)

negativity of a few "toxic teachers." Student achievement data is central. Running records are conducted with every student at least four times a year. Data is readily accessible to teachers and is the foundation for daily lesson planning.

The staff at Lincoln Elementary School in Mount Vernon, NY – a school where 58% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and whose test scores routinely hover around 95-99% proficient surpassing New York overall proficiency levels of 54-79% – credit their success, among other things, to the good management of their principal, **George Albano**. Mr. Albano takes it a step farther declaring that "one of the most important contributors to urban educational decline is the fact that principals are terribly trained and often don't even know how to organize supplies and schedules, much less how to support high-level instruction that incorporates the arts. Because principals do not properly support teachers, the nation loses good teacher every day."

There are many other schools profiled in "It's Being Done." Port Chester Middle School in New York plans their curriculum from January to January spanning two grade levels because their standardized testing is in March. East Millsboro Elementary School in Delaware has the entire grade level teams create their curriculum maps together so the one document covers all subject areas and includes

standards, performance indicators, essential questions, skills, assessments, specialized vocabulary, texts etc. and thus instruction is well coordinated. Granger High School in Granger, Washington with an 83% Latino, 7% American Indian and 10% White student population has 100% parental attendance at parent/teacher conferences, in large measure because conferences are designed so that they are student run.

The book is quite readable and my only criticism is that the approximately 15 pages dedicated to each school left me wanting to hear more details and specifics about how precisely things are done in each school. However, I felt hopeful reading this book... hopeful and angry. There are schools across the country and here in Massachusetts where the 'achievement gap' in a non issue – where all children achieve at high levels. The question is, in the words of **James McDermott**, a former teacher at University Park Campus School in Worcester who is quoted on the last page of Chenoweth's book, "We know what works in education. The research is prolific. Amazingly then, the question today is not about what works, but about why we do not implement what we know works in all schools for all kids."

(Reviewed by *Betsy Drinan*, a mentor teacher at the *Lilla Frederick Middle School*.)



Retired teacher plays Santa for Luke Davison-Toomey, 6, of Roslindale at the Birch Street House and Garden.
– Photo by Zara Tzanev, West Roxbury Transcript

Retired – Still Active Where Are They Now?

By **Dave Donovan**,
RTC Chairman

We often wonder what our retired friends and colleagues are doing these days. This column will help to answer those questions. Contrary to popular belief retirement is not a retreat to the rocking chair for most retirees. Many of us find other ways to focus our still active lives. Some of us become involved with the RTC to serve and benefit our colleagues. Retirees volunteer in many ways continuing to serve the needs of children and adults alike. Still more endeavor to provide a variety of services to bring learning, fun and entertainment into the lives of others. We have colleagues who advocate for special needs children, teach golf and yes, even become

Jolly Old St. Nick (Santa Claus) at this time of year for the benefit of their community and its children. An example of this service was featured in *The West Roxbury Transcript* Newspaper story of one of our members who played "SANTA" to the Parkway area's children in Roslindale Square on December 3rd.

In the months to come, we will endeavor to showcase the myriad of activities our still active colleagues engage in.

If you would like to nominate a colleague for a future article please send the name, and a description of their activities. You may include a photo if you wish.

Nominations can be sent to **Dave Donovan** at BTU/RTC, 180 Mount Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125 or by e-mail to : ddonovan@btu.org

RTC ALERTS

1. Information and applications for the **Retired Teachers Chapter Scholarship Program** will be forthcoming in February.
2. **RTC'S "DAY ON THE HILL"** is scheduled for May 13, 2008. This is the date for us to lobby the Massachusetts Legislature on behalf of our members to increase our COLA and protect our pensions. Last year, we had a great showing by our members at the State House. This year, we need to have an even greater showing. Save this date to join us, as we lobby our legislators.
3. **The Travel Committee** will preview its trip offerings for 2008 this month. Please call the RTC Office (Mary Cahalane and Ruthanne Kennedy) for further information.
4. A reminder that membership in the Retired Teachers Chapter of the Boston Teachers Union and its **Delta Dental** program are not automatic upon retirement, you must fill out an application for each to join the programs. Applications may be obtained at the RTC Office. (617-288-2000)
5. **New Benefit:** Retirees may now have COPE dues automatically deducted from their retirement checks (\$1.00 per month). Applications for those wishing to join and support COPE may be obtained at the BTU Office.
6. Dates for the **Spring Membership Meeting and Spring Luncheon** are in the process of being finalized. More information will be forthcoming in the February edition.

Teachers Support Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk

By Michael Maguire

In this New Year, I am asking for your support for an important cause. As the chairperson of our union's subcommittee on Making Strides Against Breast Cancer, I would like to invite you to our group, ask for your support, and finally to ask for your participation in the Making Strides walk in October 2008.

Last year, an old high school friend of mine contacted me about joining the Making Strides team. Donna and I were classmates at Boston Latin Academy and have remained friends since. She has always been involved in charity fundraising and is now working for the American Cancer Society. She contacted me in hopes of having our union become a Flagship Sponsor of their annual walk. Intrigued, I ask that she address the BTU membership. Donna and her boss did so near the end of the last school year. Unfortunately, the timing for us to join in their October 2007 walk was not good. Although that walk was six months away, we teachers take a well-deserved hiatus right in the middle of the planning time needed to organize such an undertaking.

However, very many teachers were at this year's walk on October 14, 2007. Many in our membership already participate either as members of their school's team or as individuals who walk for a family member or friend. (Please read **Sandy Christison's** article for her take on Making Strides.)

Flagship sponsors have their logos plastered on posters, fliers, web sites, pamphlets, and are featured on stage at the Hatch Shell on the day of the event. Usually flagship sponsors raise over \$20,000 in donations.

The BTU is not being asked to raise or donate any money; instead we are being asked to donate our time by promoting the walk and by participating on the day of the walk.

Why this cause for our union? There are several reasons. One, fighting breast cancer is a good cause. Breast cancer strikes nearly every family. In our family of teachers, over 65% of us are women. We lead stressful lives and are in the habit of taking more care of others than we do ourselves. By participating in Making Strides

we could very well be saving ourselves.

Two, we are in a unique position to raise awareness about one of the leading causes of death in America. We teach an increasingly underserved community. By involving every school in our system in Making Strides, we can send a message of awareness and hope to our young students and to their families. All too often the early warning signs of cancer are ignored. Our union's involvement in the annual walk may help shift those odds. Recently the city of Boston successfully ran the "Pink and Black" program which increased awareness of breast cancer in the African-American community, the BTU's involvement in Making Strides could build upon that success.

Three, this event makes for a great team



Boston Mayor Thomas Menino cuts the ribbon to start this year's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer event on October 14th.

building experience. The walk is within the first six weeks of the school year. We can have schools form their own teams. Spending a crisp morning together, united in a good cause, will lead to a greater sense of community and camaraderie.

Four, It is good PR. Do you remember about ten years ago when "teacher bashing" was all the rage? Over the past decade the BTU has done a lot to help promote good public relations within the City of Boston. We have established a community outreach position on our paid staff, we have hired a professional PR firm to represent us in the media, and we have co-founded the Homework Helper program in our libraries. Let us add Making Strides to this great list of accomplishments.

If we're not going to donate \$20,000 to Making Strides, why would they want us to be a flagship sponsor? Their reasoning is a practical as it is simple. They want to increase their numbers in the walk and they

want to spread their message of hope and life. In New York State the teachers' union makes up their largest group of walkers. Perhaps we in Boston can do the same.

Soon I shall make a motion at a membership meeting that we in the BTU become a Flagship Sponsor of Making Strides Against Breast Cancer for their October 2008 walk. Should that motion pass, then we shall organize within our union and in our schools. We shall raise awareness and money through voluntary contributions. We shall band together in a common cause but we shall not diminish the contributions of those in our ranks who already walk for the memory or recovery of a loved one.

Please discuss this idea in your teachers' rooms. Give feedback to your building reps, watch the e-Bulletins and read the BTU minutes for when the motion shall be made. Please come to that meeting, perhaps wearing pink, and vote for us to join this great cause. Thank you.

Why I Have Made Strides for Breast Cancer for 15 Years

This past October, I made Strides for the fifteenth year for the American Cancer Society's Making Strides for Breast Cancer. I received a special honor by being asked to be on the stage of the Hatch Shell along with the other walkers who also walked the entire 15 years to raise money for breast cancer for the fifteen years that Boston has hosted this truly inspiring event.

My reason for walking and raising money from friends and colleagues is personal and yet universal. My mother died of breast cancer when I was seventeen years old and I was just accepted out of state to attend college to major in teaching. She was diagnosed and died within six months and my senior year of high school became unlike I had expected.

Years later, I volunteered for the American Cancer Society and became most involved and passionate about Making Strides for Breast Cancer. I walk for my mother because I am not a doctor and cannot be the researcher to find a cure for this ravaging disease. I walk because I still fill up with tears the moment I walk onto the Esplanade to register and begin this walk. I walk because I never want anyone else to lose their mother to this cruel and invasive disease. I walk because she can't. I also walk because I have met brave and honest women who are two time survivors of more than 20 years of this cancer. I walk because my steps and ours can bring awareness and hope and prevention for families and all who are touched by breast cancer.

I was honored this year to meet **Mayor Thomas Menino** as he introduced the walk and cut the ribbon at the beginning of the route. My day was also made memorable, as I met our new superintendent, **Dr. Carol Johnson**, at this event. Our mutual reason for walking and her participation in the city's "Pink and Black" made this year's walk especially inspiring and filled me with hope for our union's consideration of becoming a Flagship Sponsor.

I would be most proud and honored to walk next fall with my BTU colleagues as we make strides to be seen as unified with our city's leaders and families as we walk together to fight Breast Cancer.

—Sandra Christison,
K2 Teacher, Chittick School, Mattapan

Photos by
Michael Maguire and
Sandra Christison



Mayor Thomas Menino with
BTU member Sandi Christison.