

# PROTEUN

*A bi-monthly publication of the Providence Teachers Union available on-line at [www.proteun.org](http://www.proteun.org) or via e-mail.*



*November 2007*

## NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

Professor Matthew M. Bodah, PhD of the University of Rhode Island was appointed mediator of the Providence Teachers Union/Providence School Board contract negotiations.

His appointment by the Rhode Island Department of Labor emanates from a request for mediation made by the Providence Teachers Union on September 4, 2007.

Thus far, Professor Bodah has chaired sessions held on September 13, 2007; October 11, 22, 2007; November 5, 7, 2007. In addition, several small working groups (sub committees of the negotiating committee) have made progress on language provisions of the Agreement. Consensus by the parties relative to language appears to be forthcoming.

Monetary items continue to present the greatest challenge facing the negotiators. The parties are struggling to find agreement on a monetary package which will be fair to both the City and the teachers; one that recognizes student need, teacher worth and municipal capacity.

## EDUCATION NEWS

### [Providence School Department Budget](#)

The Providence School Board approved its 2007-2008 budget totaling \$314.3 million that Finance Director, Mark Dunham, acknowledged as “inadequate” to improve student performance. “This is a sorry state of affairs, we’re on an unsustainable path given our growth,” said Dunham. One School Board member, Ronnie Young, said he would not vote in favor of a budget that was “so harmful to students and teachers alike.” At the conclusion of discussion Young joined the rest of the Board in passing the budget.

### [Special Education Class-Size Question Goes to Regents](#)

RI Superior Court Judge Allen P. Rubine ordered the Union to make its arguments before the Board of Regents instead of the Superior Court. The Union has sued Commissioner Peter McWalters for allowing the Providence School Board to raise class-size for mild/moderate special education students from 10 to 12. The Union argued that the school department sought the waiver because it faced a \$3.4 million budget shortfall, not because the move would help students and that the Commissioner had no authority to approve the school department’s request. Judge Rubine directed the Union to bring its argument before the Board of Regents which oversees the Department of Education and the Commissioner. A hearing has been set for Wednesday, November 7, 2007, at 1:00 p.m.

### [Regents to Conduct Hearings](#)

The RI Board of Regents will conduct hearings on two consecutive nights to take testimony from individual/groups regarding the change in Special Education Regulations proposed by Commissioner Peter McWalters. Hearings will be held on November 7, 2007 at 5 p.m. at CCRI in Warwick and also on November 8, 2007 at 5 p.m. at the RIDE offices in the Shepherd Building, Providence.

### [Teachers Agree to Merit Pay](#)

The City of New York and the United Federation of Teachers reached a landmark deal on October 17, 2007 that will give teachers bonuses if their schools significantly raise student test scores. The program will start this year in 200 low-performing schools and grow to 400 schools next year. If a school meets goals for test score improvement, an administrator, two teachers selected by their colleagues and the school principal will decide how to distribute the bonuses, which will be approximately \$3,000 per teacher.

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Dear Colleagues:

The start of this school year began with a membership meeting of our Union on Orientation Day. Rather than reporting to school, as had been our customary practice, we needed to meet in order that everyone would have an opportunity to receive an update on negotiations. In addition, we needed time to discuss our Executive Board’s decision and rationale for returning to work under the terms and conditions of our 2004-2007 contract. Said agreement will remain in full force and effect until the parties reach a successor agreement.

Upon entering our classrooms and expecting to find the usual start-up problems, we experienced, first-hand, a school system in distress. This year we found an unprecedented array of serious problems confronting us (e.g. teacher reassignments as late as the day before school started, reassignments continuing well into the first month, incorrect schedules, insufficient supplies and materials, lack of textbooks and a multitude of contractual violations). In my 22 years as a teacher in Providence, this year represents the poorest school opening in memory. To support my contention, teacher after teacher has expressed the same sentiment.

As a consequence, the Union office staff, executive board members and building delegates have devoted an extraordinary amount of time correcting the errors manufactured by management. Although the Superintendent acknowledges the mistakes made, many have yet to be corrected (especially supplies, materials and texts). These uncorrected problems continue to dominate our work day.

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## EDUCATION NEWS

### Teachers Bring Issues to School Board

On October 9 2007, Shauna Southern, a Physical Education teacher at the Lillian Feinstein Elementary School at Sackett Street brought a laundry list of concerns from physical education teachers across the city demonstrating that Physical Education in Providence and Providence children are getting “short-changed” by overcrowded gyms, inadequate supplies , improper equipment, poor scheduling and inappropriate gym space. Southern stated that physical education teachers “go above and beyond the call of duty” but are being “pushed aside.”

On September 10, 2007, Julie Latessa, an elementary teacher at the Veazie Street School, took issue with Superintendent Donnie Evans’ statement on August 14, 2007 that “holding all students to high expectations may be a tough sell for teachers who assume that urban students can’t achieve at the same levels as their middle-class peers.” Julie gave specific examples where teachers hold high expectations for themselves and their students. She also counted Dr. Evans’ statement that “schools treat parents as obstacles to overcome” by giving several examples of schools and, in particular, teachers treating parents as “essential partners in our mission to do what’s best for kids.”

### Senator Reed Introduces Environmental Literacy Plan

U.S. Senator Jack Reed (RI) has introduced legislation which could offset some of the effects of the No Child Left Behind Law. With schools emphasizing reading and math, there has been less time for field trips and other subjects. The bill would provide \$100 million a year for five years to train teachers about the environment and get students outdoors. Entitled the No Child Left Inside Act of 2007, the proposed legislation would also call for states to create environmental literacy plans to get children engaged in the environment and appreciate its role in their lives.

It is important, therefore, that we recognize (not accept) the nature and seriousness of these ongoing problems. The school department’s Business Manager has stated publicly that the 2007-2008 budget is totally inadequate. Realizing that students and teachers will not be adequately served this year, the School Board without dissent approved the budget demonstrating, once again, that they are powerless.

It is equally as important that we recognize (not accept) that the Superintendent’s plan for school improvement and student success is vague, lacks specificity and is unrecognizable.

On the brighter side, is the undisputed fact that our teachers are serving our students in the most caring and creative ways. With each school visit, I see teacher after teacher working above and beyond what is expected. I see professionalism, dedication and competence. That some critics choose to ignore the contributions of so many is more than unconscionable, it is hypocritical.

So what shall we do?

Rest assured that our negotiators will continue to bring creative, forward thinking, positive proposals to the bargaining table and we will continue to expect to be treated fairly.

Your job this year is to continue doing the outstanding work you do on a daily basis and try not, as hard as it may be, to allow present conditions to dampen your spirit.

My job and the job of your executive board will be to represent you to the fullest in securing a new contract and to convince management that “together” we can make Providence schools one of the finest urban schools systems in the nation.

I will continue to press the mayor, the legislature, the school board and the superintendent that, given the opportunity, Providence teachers and the Providence Teachers Union can turn this district around.

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## DIRECTOR OF MEMBER SERVICES’ REPORT

### Grievances

The 2006-07 Annual Grievance Report has been released to all building delegates. A total of 207 grievances were filed during the 2006-07 school year— which was a significant decrease from the number of grievances filed during the previous school year of 309. Teachers interested in reviewing the 2006-07 Annual Grievance Report in its entirety should see their building delegate or contact the union office.

Unfortunately, this school year, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of grievances filed . According to our records, during the month of September 2007, a total of 36 grievances were filed — an 80% increase compared to September 2006. We also experienced a significant increase of grievances filed during the month of October 2007. A total of 54 grievances filed represents a 200% increase as compared to October 2006. We recognize that the increase of formal grievances filed by our members has a direct correlation with low job satisfaction and morale and this message has been communicated to Dr. Evans.

### Layoffs/Recalls/Vacancies

As of the last School Board meeting in October, 102 laid-off teachers have not been recalled to a full-time assignment. Twenty (20) have been recalled as LTSP-R’s; Seventy-four (74) have been recalled as LTSPs and eight (8) have not been recalled due to emergency certification. There are 73 clear vacancies being filled by substitute teachers. The majority of those vacancies (64) are at site-based/charter schools. Those positions were posted in September and full-time appointments are scheduled for November.

### 11th Annual Book Drive—Dress Down Day

The Union will hold its 11th Annual Book Drive for Providence Kids. A dress down day will be held on Monday, November 5, 2007. Last year, the Union donated 2,532 books to 11 Providence community centers and Hasbro Children’s Hospital. Please support this year’s Book Drive by participating in the dress down day on **November 5th!** For more information, see your union building delegate.



Contact Maura @ 421-4014 or [mgalvao@proteun.org](mailto:mgalvao@proteun.org).

Our demands are quite reasonable and, by-the-way, quite basic. We expect to be treated as professionals. We expect to have the tools we need to best meet the needs of our students. We expect our classrooms and our schools to be environments conducive to teaching and learning and we expect to be full partners in all matters pertaining to school reform. We also expect our school department to be an effective, efficiently run organization and not a knee-jerk system in turmoil.

These are our goals for the year as insurmountable as they may seem. We need to support each other. We need to assist each other. We need to remain unified in our attempts to achieve our goals.

Be assured that I will keep you informed as we move forward and that I appreciate your continued support and assistance.



## PRESIDENT'S SCHEDULE

### September

- 3 Negotiations
- 4 Membership Meeting
- 5 PTU Executive Board
- 6 Mark Dunham  
Level A Grievance Hearings
- 10 Marcia Reback  
AFL-CIO Executive Board  
Providence School Board
- 11 Superior Court-Sp. Ed. Variance  
Program/Site-Based Committee  
Building Delegate Meeting
- 12 Retirement Board—Coaches
- 13 Negotiations—Mediator  
Level A Grievance Hearings
- 12 RIFT Executive Board
- 13 Superintendent Evans
- 14 Professional Time Committee  
Atty. Marc Gursky
- 21 Tomas Hanna—Labor  
Management Collaboration  
RIFT—Jim Langevin
- 24 Teacher Evaluation Committee  
Atty. Marc Gursky
- 26 Atty. Marc Gursky
- 27 Level A Grievance Hearings  
Athletic Coaches
- 28 Superior Court—  
Sp. Ed. Variance

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The 2007-2008 school year will be a very busy year with many issues needing to be addressed. The duties of the Executive Director include attendance at all School Board meetings, presentation of grievances to School Board (Level B), representing teachers on personnel issues at Human Resources, at the school level and at the School Board level, being present at all arbitration hearings in addition to helping in the presentation of all these cases, representing the PTU on numerous committees that are listed in the Collective Bargaining Agreement as well as additional committees such as the District Crisis Team and the District Building Advisory Committee and as a member of the negotiating committee, attendance at all face-to-face meeting held at the Commissioner's office, meetings with school faculties, preparation and monitoring of the PTU budget, meetings with the accountant as a yearly audit of the budget takes place and overseeing the Health & Wellness Program and meeting with the Board of Trustees, and maintaining constant communication with Human Resources, Payroll and Central level administrators to resolve issues as they arise.

Here is a brief summary of some of the outstanding issues that will be ongoing during the school year:

### 1. Arbitrations

Once scheduled, each hearing is held with a neutral arbitrator who will hear testimony from both sides prior to deciding if the Collective Bargaining Agreement was violated. Each hearing lasts a full day and usually more than one day is required to complete all the testimony and present documentation on the contract violation.

This year there are seven cases scheduled for arbitration; they include the following issues: Personnel issues (2 cases), Unfair & Inequitable Treatment (1 case), Medical Benefits (1 case), Violation of Past Grievance Decision (1 case) all scheduled between now and January 2008.

In addition, three decisions on arbitrations that have been completed are due by the end of November. Two decisions have been received over the summer both favorable to the Union.

### 2. Committee Assignments

The committees the Executive Director serves on are as follows: Teacher Evaluation Committee, Program Committee, Joint Professional Time Committee, Joint School Improvement Intervention Committee, District-wide Crisis Team, District Building Advisory Committee, Joint Site-Based Committee, Negotiations Committee and meetings at the Commissioner's level. All of these committees will meet on a regular basis through-out the school year.

In addition, members of the PTU staff and selected teachers meet bi-weekly with the Deputy Superintendent and central level administrators to discuss and resolve issues as they arise.

### 3. Human Resources/Payroll/Administration

The staff of the PTU and the Executive Director work closely with the administration at 797 to address issues/concerns that are brought to our attention by teachers. It is also necessary to maintain daily communications with Human Resources to work through various personnel issues throughout the school year.

### 4. Personnel

The Executive Director represents teachers at school level, human resource meetings and School Board hearings whenever necessary.

Contact Paul at 421-4014 or [Pvorro@proteun.org](mailto:Pvorro@proteun.org).

## PRESIDENT'S SCHEDULE

### October

- 1 Tomas Hanna—Labor Management Collaboration  
Level A Grievance Hearings
- 2 Fortes—Donors Choose
- 3 RIDE-Face to Face  
PTU Executive Board  
Mayor Cicilline
- 4 Atty. Marc Gursky  
Youth Voices
- 5 Teacher Evaluation Committee  
Tomas Hanna—Labor Management Collaboration
- 9 Building Delegate Meeting  
School Board
- 10 Membership Meeting  
Tomas Hanna-Labor Management Collaboration
- 11 Negotiations  
Gateway Seminar/Maryland—Peer Assistance & Review
- 12 Gateway Seminar/Maryland—Peer Assistance & Review
- 13 Gateway Seminar/Maryland—Peer Assistance & Review
- 14 Gateway Seminar/Maryland—Peer Assistance & Review
- 15 Teacher Evaluation Committee  
Level A Grievance Hearings
- 16 Youth Voices
- 17 Atty. Marc Gursky  
Eastside Public Education Coalition
- 18 Special Executive Board Meeting  
RIFT Executive Board Meeting
- 19 Tomas Hanna—Labor Management Collaboration
- 21 Wallace Foundation/New York
- 22 Wallace Foundation/New York
- 23 Wallace Foundation/New York
- 24 Wallace Foundation/New York
- 25 PSD-Great City Schools  
Rep. Rene Menard Fundraiser  
Diabetes Foundation Fundraiser
- 29 Colleen Callahan  
Level A Grievance Hearings
- 30 PSD-Advisories
- 31 Nurses

*(See CALENDAR OF EVENTS for listing of school visits)*

## UNION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Peer Review and Evaluation Part I

For many years, teachers determined what experiences students needed to help them understand the world. One way to enrich their students' lives was by taking them on field trips.

Teachers, new to the profession, did not have to struggle to plan any of this. Permission forms and contact numbers would be provided by more senior teachers. During the planning, veteran teachers could give advice on which lessons they found useful to connect students to their new experiences.

This situation was normal and typical, and it made it easy for more experienced teachers to mentor and support the less experienced. It was a natural process which created an environment of collegiality. Once rapport was established, then teachers could feel free to express their concerns and to exchange ideas. Teachers felt comfortable inviting a colleague to share experiences and ideas on effective practices and strategies.

In time, all this changed. Teaching became a high pressure job. The "teachable moment" became an idea of the past, because everyone was expected to follow strict time-lines, and often were expected to implement strategies they had not fully mastered.

Teachers gradually became isolated from each other in the day to day practice of their craft. Feedback was transferred from teachers to teams of people passing through and looking for specific signs of what they considered effective teaching. This lack of collegiality encouraged competitiveness and, perhaps, even some paranoia.

Union Leaders saw this happening and formal Teacher Mentor Programs were established. Effective Teacher Mentoring has many facets. It offers support, it promotes feedback, and, when appropriate, allows for reviewing effective and/or ineffective teaching practices.

There are school districts throughout the US who have established teams of teachers to review and even evaluate teacher performance. The necessity of this is arguable, but it is, nevertheless, a trend.

With the implementation of NCLB, Teacher Quality was placed in the limelight. As a result, the Highly Qualified Teacher designation was created. For many lawmakers, the present criteria are not enough. Plans are being formulated to expand Highly Qualified to Highly Qualified and "Effective," as it relates to student performance. Once again, Union leadership is needed to be certain the process is not misused. Our experience with Teacher Mentor Programs will lay the foundation for how this might be done appropriately.

Contact Fr. Nick Milas at 421-4014 or [Frnickm2@aol.com](mailto:Frnickm2@aol.com).

## Teacher Hero

Teacher Jerry Luongo doesn't consider himself special, but the students and staff at West Broadway Elementary School are calling him their hero. While eating lunch in the school cafeteria on Friday, October 19, 2007, a 3rd grade student began to choke on his food. Jerry noticed the student having difficulty breathing; rushed to the youngster and performed the Heimlich maneuver. The obstruction was dislodged and the student's breathing returned to normal.

**Hats off to Jerry from all Providence teachers  
and the Providence Teachers Union.**



## Know Your Field Representative

One of the first questions that Phil and Ed are often asked as they visit their schools is: "Just what is a Field Representative?" In this first PROTEUN of the 2007-08 school year, we would like to answer this question and also introduce you to Phil DeCecco and Ed Neil the two Field Representative who serve your schools.

A Field Representative is a full time union employee who acts as a liaison between teachers and the school department administration. They are available each day either at the union office or during school visits to answer questions about the contract, benefits, and working conditions. In addition, they may help teachers to solve problems that they are experiencing with payroll or human resources. Finally, a Field Representative can assist a teacher with filing a grievance. Both of our present Field representatives have extensive backgrounds as union members and are extremely well acquainted with the contract, grievance procedures, and arbitration decisions. After a grievance is filed, they act as a mediator with the administration to try to resolve the issue before it goes to a hearing with the Superintendent.

Some examples of issues that Phil and Ed have dealt with this year are: payment and credit for PD, assignment of subs and recall of regular teachers, and obtaining credit and back pay for teachers who were not placed on the correct step at the time of their hiring.

In the coming issues of the PROTEUN, they will be highlighting issues and events at each of their schools. If your school has any significant event or accomplishment during the month, please e-mail or call Phil or Ed so that they can incorporate it into their report.

### [Phil DeCecco:](#)

Phil started his teaching career at Roger Williams Middle School as a social studies teacher then a guidance counselor at Hope High School and Hanley Career and Technical School.

Throughout his 34 years as a teacher in Providence, Phil was also an active Providence Teachers Union member. Phil served as a Building Delegate, co-chair of the 40 Week Club and held a position on our Negotiating Committee, Health and Welfare Fund Committee, School Safety Committee and others.

Phil was elected to vice President of High Schools, Vice President-at-Large and ultimately President of the Providence Teachers Union.

Phil's vast knowledge of our contract coupled with his genuine sincerity has enabled him to be the ideal PTU field representative.

### [Ed Neil:](#)

A Providence teacher from September 1972 to March 2007, Ed Neil first started his career as an English teacher at Central High School and later transferred to the Social Studies Department. He served as Social Studies Department Head at Central from 1987 to 2007.

During his 35 years as a teacher in Providence, Ed was active in the Providence Teachers Union. His union membership began when he joined the picket line on his first day at Central. Later he served as a member and chair of the Central High School Union Faculty Committee until his election as Building Delegate. He was Building Delegate from 1983 until 2003.

In addition to his career as a teacher, Ed also served for 32 years in the US Army Reserve as a Civil Affairs Officer rising to the rank of Colonel. His military experience has covered the full spectrum of military life and included his deployment to Bosnia in 1996 where he served as International Education and Reconstruction liaison officer for the new republic.

Ed has been involved in many precedent setting grievances during his long union membership. This along with his extensive knowledge of the collective bargaining agreement will enable him to assist our membership with the issues facing them.

**Contact Phil or Ed at 421-4014 or [Pdececco@proteun.org](mailto:Pdececco@proteun.org)/[ENeil@proteun.org](mailto:ENeil@proteun.org).**

## TRIP TO ITALY



**9 Days (2 travel days)  
Departing June 28, 2008**

**\$2,259.00 per person  
(excluding taxes and fees)  
Excursions are optional.**

- ◆ Round trip air transportation with a major airline, airport transfers and escorts.
- ◆ The services of a bilingual Go Ahead Tour Director.
- ◆ 7 nights accommodations in comfortable, well located hotels with twin beds and private bath or shower.
- ◆ All hotel service charges and tips, baggage handling and local taxes.
- ◆ Buffet breakfast daily.
- ◆ Private deluxe motor coach with reclining seats and restroom.

For more information, contact Bob Venezia at [Boby38@cox.net](mailto:Boby38@cox.net) or Don Izzo at [don\\_izzo@yahoo.com](mailto:don_izzo@yahoo.com).



## FYI

### Flu Clinic



The PSD Flu Shot Clinic will be held on November 6, 2007 at Mt. Pleasant High School and November 7, 2007 at Cooley/PAIS from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. School nurse-teachers were asked to distribute registration forms to staff/faculty.

There is no charge for the flu clinic; however, teachers will need to present either their Blue Cross or United Health card for identification.

### Prescription Co-payment Reimbursement



Teachers who have paid more than \$600 in out-of-pocket expenses in prescription co-pays during the September 1, 2006 to August 31, 2007 contract year should complete the prescription co-pay reimbursement form for payment of eligible expenses. The form may be obtained by calling the Union office or the Providence School Department's Controller's office. **Request forms and documentation must be submitted within 120 days of the close of the contract year (August 31).**

### Military Duty – Providence City Ordinance

On July 9, 2004, Section 17-95 of Providence Code of Ordinances was amended (retroactive to January 1, 2002) to provide compensation to any full-time City employee ordered to active military duty equivalent to the difference between the employee's regular City salary and the employee's military duty salary.

The Union has requested that the PSD identify any teacher who has been granted a Military Leave of absence. We have outreached to those individuals to make sure that they receive the benefits afforded to them under the City Ordinance. To date, four Providence teachers have been activated for military duty and have either received reimbursement from the Providence School Department or have initiated the process.

**Contact Maura at 421-4014 or [mgalvao@proteun.org](mailto:mgalvao@proteun.org).**

## UNION OFFERS

### Sprint/Nextel Discount

- ◆ PTU members are offered a 15% discount
- ◆ \$50 of any phone (new activations)
- ◆ Unlimited night calling starting at 7 p.m.
- ◆ No fees

For more information, please contact:  
Chris Graff  
401-641-1690  
[Christopher.graff@sprint.com](mailto:Christopher.graff@sprint.com)

### Lotus Floral Design

- ◆ 15% discount for Union members on all purchase
- ◆ Located at:

1920 Mineral Spring Avenue, Suite 8  
North Providence, RI 02904  
(401) 533-9800  
[www.lotusflorist.com](http://www.lotusflorist.com)

## DonorsChoose.org

At DonorsChoose.org, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches and librarians may propose ideas for needed resources. Individuals around the nation can search student projects by areas of interest, learn about classroom needs, and choose to fund the project idea(s) they find most compelling.

The process for becoming a DonorsChoose teacher is simple and straightforward:

1. Register at [www.donorschoose.org](http://www.donorschoose.org). DonorsChoose invites front line educators at public schools to register.
2. Write a brief project description (approximately 400 words) describing the proposed student project and how students will benefit. Tell your story and speak from the heart!
3. Identify the specific resources requested and their prices, and answer some brief questions.
4. Watch your idea be funded and come to life! And provide feedback to your donor(s).

Several Providence teachers have already benefited from DonorsChoose.

For more information or to arrange a presentation at your school, please contact Thalia Theodore, Northeast Deputy Director, at [thalia@donorschoose.org](mailto:thalia@donorschoose.org).