# The Baltimore Educator

*The official quarterly publication of the Baltimore Teachers Union*

# Solidarity

## THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

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# A Message from President Brown

Dear Members,

This fall, I and the BTU staff have been busy fighting to protect your rights and safety. As BTU members face a year unlike any other, we have been working with teachers, PSRPs, related service providers, clinicians, counselors, library media specialists, central office staff and more to build power and build our union's strength.

This fall the **PSRP Chapter ratified the Wage Reopener of its contract**. The Tentative Agreement for the PSRP Wage Re-opener stated that the PSRPs will receive a raise of **2.25% or $900, whichever is higher, retroactive to July 1, 2021.** The agreement was ratified by the BTU PRSP Chapter on October 29 (60% of the chapter voted, 100% of those who voted, voted yes). The school board ratified the Wage Reopener at the November 9 school board meeting. The raise should have been implemented on the paycheck the week of Thanksgiving. The BTU will continue to fight for a living wage for our lower PSRP pay scales in the full contract negotiations this spring.

**Teacher wages increased as well this fall**, with a 2.25% pay adjustment with retroactive pay on the October 29 paycheck. Non-evaluation AUs were awarded, along with any accompanying interval movement, on the November 12 paycheck. Retroactive pay was on the next paycheck. We have asked the district to send out a memo about this confusion.

BTU also secured **increased pay for the New Teacher Institute**. Instead of $125 per day, participating teachers will earn $35/hour (nearly a 100% increase for a seven-hour day, totaling $245 per day). This retroactive payment was also scheduled for the November 12 paycheck.

BTU staff is also working hard to enforce the contract, and filing grievances where member rights have been violated. BTU filed a class action grievance due to a unilateral healthcare benefit change, in which BCPSS recently began charging $20 copays for chiropractor and acupuncture services. The hearing is still ongoing and we hope to have it resolved soon. BTU also filed a class action grievance due to contact tracing protocols not being followed by North Ave contact tracers. There were two hearings so far and the case is ongoing.

I am inviting members to join us (virtually) at the next **BTU General Membership Meeting on March 6 at 5:30pm**. Please register by 11:59pm on March 5 at bit.ly/btugmm2. We will be discussing important updates, including information about substitutes, and there will be breakout rooms on the following topics: PSRP Negotiations, Certification, and National Board Certification. As part of the state's Blueprint/Kirwan education funding, starting next year, teachers who earn National Board Certification will earn an additional $10,000 stipend, and an additional $7,000 stipend if they work at a high needs school as defined by MSDE. I encourage members to come to the meeting to learn more.

November 1, 2021 was the **deadline to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination** for all BCPSS staff. Medical and Religious Exemptions were determined; those not granted an exemption will have six weeks from the date of denial to comply. The District has been sending out letters of reprimand. However, no actions will occur until Dec 13 and the district will inform the union of any disciplinary actions. Any disciplinary action imposed by the district will follow BTU members' established due process rights. The union will work with all members affected to ensure their due process.

Finally, in October, I presented BTU's 9 Demands for Safe Schools. Contact your BTU field rep if your school is not following the District Health and Safety protocols. We need members to email the school board with examples of how their schools are not implementing the Health and Safety protocols to support these demands and make them a reality. BTU staff is pushing back at the district level, but it's BTU members whose actions and voices truly put the power behind our name. When we fight together, we truly win.

In solidarity,

President Diamontė Brown

# *Know Your Contract: Transfers*

*Articles 10 (Teacher Chapter) and XII.2 (PSRP Chapter)*
*By Cynthia Sjoquist, BTU Field Rep*

While the Voluntary Transfer Window is some ways away (late April), involuntary transfers (also called "being surplussed") may happen throughout the year. Despite the Maryland State statute which grants the CEO the ultimate authority to assign and appoint based on the needs of the system, you do have rights! Here's a look at your rights in both voluntary transfer and involuntary transfer situations.

## Voluntary Transfers

**Who can apply:**
- Any PSRP who received a rating better than the lowest possible (developing or ineffective).
- Any tenured teacher who received a rating of developing or better.
- Any educator who has been surplussed or is at a closing school.

**What to expect:**
For both PSRP and Teacher Chapters there shall be a voluntary transfer process each year.
- The process happens during the "window of mutual consent", a 60-day window that must end after May 1.
- Educators can apply for voluntary transfer anytime during this window by electronic process.
- Educators who apply will be visible online to principals, have a list of vacancies and will be invited to the Transfer Fair.
- No transfer can be denied for reasons that are arbitrary, unreasonable, capricious, because of personal principal preference OR because an educator is in a "locked position".
- If you apply for a transfer and do not find a good fit during the window of mutual consent, you will be assigned to a new school location.

## Involuntary Transfers

**Who Can be Transferred?**
Anyone. Seniority is not a factor.

**Why can someone be involuntarily transferred?**
- Budget
- Needs of the district
- Principal discretion

**What rights do we have?**
PSRP Chapter members:
- cannot be transferred without just cause
- are entitled to a meeting to discuss the cause
- can only be transferred once per year.

Teacher Chapter Members:
- cannot be transferred for reasons that are arbitrary, capricious, or unreasonable
- are entitled to ten days notice
- are entitled to a meeting to discuss cause

*The Baltimore Educator is the official quarterly magazine of the Baltimore Teachers Union. It is published by the BTU Communications Committee. BTU members are encouraged to submit articles of fewer than 1,000 words by emailing* communicationscommittee@baltu.org. *Organizations interested in placing an advertisement in the Baltimore Educator may also contact us at the address above. The submissions deadline for the next issue is February 14, 2022. Read the Baltimore Educator online at https://www.baltimoreteachers.org/category/newsletter*

# Striketober becoming Strikesgiving?
## Is a much bigger labor rebellion in the making?

*St. Vincent's nurses on strike for eight months*

*By Alan Rebar, BTU member*

*Editor's note: The status of these strikes is subject to change at any time. This information was current at the time the article was written but might be outdated by the time of publication.*

Many of us have heard about Striketober: 100,000 workers went on strike or authorized strikes all over the U.S. in October 2021. Which groups of working people have launched a new strike wave? Which strikes have become long term historic battles? How can we support them? Why is there a new strike wave? Let's try to answer these questions.

First, let's look at the actual strikes and how to help. Closest to home, Maryland is in some ways a leading state in the school bus driver rebellion. Drivers in Anne Arundel, Charles, Calvert, Howard and Baltimore counties have gone on strike or organized "call outs" - effectively, wildcat sickout strikes. (A wildcat strike is when workers decide on their own, independent of their union, to go out on strike.) In general, the drivers won bonuses and support from politicians. Some of the drivers have taken advantage of the momentum of the moment and have voted to form unions.

Two epic strikes continue at the 8 or 9 month mark, which means that workers and their families fighting for the right to workplace safety and dignity have not received a paycheck in over half a year! One way to show solidarity to our labor siblings is to donate to their Strike Fund.

1. The historic Warrior Met coal miners strike continues in Alabama:

Donate to the online strike fund (does not accept credit cards) or mail your donation to:
UMWA 2021 Strike Aid Fund
P.O. Box 513
Dumfries, VA 22026

2. Nurses of the Massachusetts Nurses Association at Saint Vincent's hospital are hitting the 8-month mark of their strike:

Donate to the online strike fund or mail your donation to:
MNA Nurses Strike Fund
Massachusetts Nurses Association
340 Turnpike St
Canton, MA 02021

Some of the other strikes that have recently taken place or are still ongoing include:

- UAW Local 838 John Deere workers in Iowa – went on strike on October 14 – voting on 3rd proposed contract on Nov. 17 as strike continues.
- Scranton, PA teacher strike – SFT, AFT Local 1147
  - *Dig deep – donate to the AFT strike fund for Scranton teachers and West Coast health care workers!*
- BCTGW bakery union strikes at Nabisco and Kellogg's
- USW steelworker and IAM machinist strikes in West Virginia

- UFCW distillery workers at Heaven Hill Whiskey, Kentucky
- Teamsters Local 533 transit workers in Nevada; Teamsters Locals 20 and 377 in Ohio
- AFM Local 23 symphony musicians in Texas
- Health Care workers in Washington, nurses in Minnesota, New York, California

There are many reasons to believe that working people are in fact reacting to general economic shifts which may be long term. If true, this is a turning of the tide which shifted heavily into the bosses' favor in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In other words, a lot more is going on here than the fact that a lot of workers are angry. After all, a lot of workers are ALWAYS angry! The battleground may have tilted in our favor and away from the bosses.

The strikes that became Striketober, (and now, Strikesgiving) are supporting these economists' claims. Note well: there is supposedly a "labor shortage." Or, in fact, is there only a "shortage" of workers willing to work for less and less of the value they create? The quitting phenomenon is another indicator that the tide has changed. Record numbers of workers are quitting.

Labor is a commodity like food, clothes, steel or cars. And with giant corporations who have long opposed a $15 minimum wage suddenly offering $15 or more, plus benefits and a signing bonus, we can say that workers and bosses are in a seller's market for labor.

Certainly, other key factors beyond the larger economy are also driving strikes: especially murderously long hours, general workplace safety issues, COVID safety, and inflation. Various strikes have been driven by employer indifference to danger on the job. Workers have had it with 6-day weeks of 12-hour shifts, even weeks and months at a time of no days off–7 day work weeks! Some workers have died in terrible accidents that can be blamed squarely on exhaustion and other such safety hazards. And of course, workers remain tired of working for beans during COVID outbreaks in workplaces, while millionaire or billionaire CEOs get to phone it in virtually from the safety of their own homes.

Where will this strike wave lead? Only time will tell, but workers' power appears to be on the rise for at least the short-term, and quite possibly for the long-term as well.

*On strike against Kellogg. Black women workers continue to play a decisive leading role in the labor movement as Striketober morphs in Strikesgiving.*

# PSRP Spotlight: Eileen M. Eldridge

*Eileen Eldridge is a Secretary and Administrative Assistant at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. She has worked in BCPSS for almost 30 years. Ms. Eldridge has served as a BTU Building Representative for 10 years and has held several other leadership roles in her school.*

**How did you first get into the field of education?**

My beginning was as a Parent Volunteer at Rognel Heights Elementary School, which later became an elementary/middle school. My first principal was Mrs. Sarah Horsey. As a volunteer, I took much pride in organizing other parents to render assistance to the school. The next year, I became the school's School-Community Liaison. My job was to build the bridge to connect the school with the parents and community. It was a task I would do having two children in a stroller and two by my side. As people would notice, I took the assignment very seriously and was good at doing it.

The following year, the principal decided to hire me as the secretary of the school. I told her "NO, thank you!" many times. When she would see me, she would say, "You are going to be my secretary," and I would say, "No I am not!" One day, I decided to write her a letter of resignation for a job that I did not even have at the time. She thought that was funny, but I seriously did not want the job as secretary of any school or organization. I was enjoying my time being a Home Technician, which comes with many demands and much joy.

Well, much to my surprise, I went home very angry and constantly said to myself, "I am not going to be her secretary or anybody's secretary!" Then, that night, after having the conversation with that principal and submitting the letter of resignation, I had a dream. In this dream, there were many people broken and hurting. At the end of the dream I heard a small voice say to me, "I need you to be in place!" When I awakened from that dream, all I knew was that I could not get to the school fast enough to accept the offer to become the Secretary of the school formerly known as Rognel Heights Elementary School.

From that point, it was just one great moment after another. No, they were not all good or easy, however, the end results were enlightening and encouraging. I started my journey in November of 1993 and today this journey continues to bring me before children, parents, and other stakeholders who are blessed by our interaction.

**What are some challenges you have faced in your career and how have you risen to those challenges?**

Through the years, I have faced parents who wanted to give up their children, children who wanted to commit suicide, parents who fought over custody, etc. All these situations have helped me to mature into the Secretary/Administrative Assistant that I am today. However, I believe that the most empowering moment, in this journey, has been the opportunity to serve beside my first principal, pretty much as her assistant principal. This came to be because the assistant principal left on sick leave and never returned. My first year as a Secretary was very empowering. Mrs. Sarah Horsey, was able to guide me out of many years of solitude to being able to work effectively and efficiently in an environment that motivated me to use my gifts, skills and talents to help others.

**Please describe your involvement in the union.**

Since accepting the position of Secretary in 1993, I have served as a Building Representative for BTU (PSRPs), for 10 years. During this time, I worked to close the gap between staff and administration. I am able to fight for the employee, while making sure that rules, policies and procedures were followed by all, including the administration.

**What other leadership roles have you had?**

I have served on the Attendance Committee for many years, and was able to keep the school within the guidelines for acceptable attendance percentages. I also coordinated and managed our yearly schoolwide skating trip, which became an incentive for perfect attendance, as the years went by.

**What was it like transitioning from elementary to high school?**

I have been employed by Baltimore City Schools for 29 + years (26 of them at Rognel Heights) and I am now assigned to a high school. Who could have imagined! I never wanted to work in a high school! I always felt that I would not be able to roll up my sleeves and get in the trenches. Boy was I wrong. I have been at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, under the leadership of Director Jacqueline Williams. Just when I thought I knew it all and things could not get better, they did. Serving at the high school level brings me into a new world and more complicated situations to help others through. At Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, my role is more of an Administrative Assistant. In this role, I have the opportunity to provide support in many facets of school structure and operations, while maintaining my level of interaction with parents, students and staff. I participate on the School Family Council and assist various other committees with their efforts.

At Poly, I enjoy the interaction with the more mature students. Although they have aged and matured, in some areas, they are still in need of the guidance that I am able to offer. It excites me, each morning, to know that I will have another opportunity to plant a seed that will help a young person to grow. And, to actually see that growth is such an amazing experience. I also enjoy the interaction with administrators, parents and staff. The sharing of knowledge as it relates to various experiences is very enlightening.

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

Being a Secretary/Administrative Assistant comes with its daily challenges and rewards, however, I am proud to be in the position and able to serve the many stakeholders in the Baltimore City Public School System.

# Teacher Spotlight: Jen Lozier

*Jen Lozier is a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) at Windsor Hills Elementary/Middle School, where she has worked for the past 6 years of her 10 year career with BCPSS. Jen has also served as her school's Union Learning Representative (ULR) for the past 5 years. Additionally, she currently serves on the District's Professional Peer Review Committee.*

**What are some unique challenges you face as an SLP?**

I'd say one of the biggest challenges SLPs face is the amount of paperwork and meetings we have. I'd guess only a little more than half of my job is direct sessions with students, where the other half is writing session notes, progress reports, assessment reports, and attending IEP meetings. This is definitely the biggest factor with SLP burnout in the school setting. Scheduling all of our sessions around students' lunch and resource schedules and meetings can also be a "fun" challenge.

**How has your job been different since the start of the pandemic?**

The pandemic really caused a shift in my service delivery model. Since most of my students aren't able to access technology independently, they required parent support to participate in speech therapy sessions. This really shifted to me coaching the parent on how to provide speech strategies to improve their child's language and comprehension. Also, the wearing of masks affects speech intelligibility and interpreting non-verbal communication in others.

**What inspired you to become a Union Learning Rep?**

When I first started working for BCPSS, I found a lot of people didn't have much information on the AU system and how our raises work. I think this is a great feature that Baltimore City offers that almost no other district does. I love getting to show my colleagues how to navigate career pathways, find opportunities to improve their practice, develop AU courses and projects, and receive tuition reimbursement for outside coursework.

**Describe your work on the Professional Peer Review Committee.**

I facilitate cohort sessions for Related Service Provider candidates who are applying for Model where we walk through each section of the Model rubric. I answer questions, show exemplars from previous cohorts, and provide feedback on artifacts the candidates create.

**What motivated you to get involved with helping to support candidates for the Model Pathway?**

There are so many talented teachers and RSPs in Baltimore City who deserve to be recognized as a Model teacher and I wanted to be a part of encouraging and leading others to apply for Model. I think in past years, a lot of people were turned off or intimidated to apply. Kimberly Hescox Mooney completely revamped the model process a few years ago, making it more equitable and providing more support to applicants. I love being in a position to encourage my colleagues to apply and answering any questions they may have.

**Why is being a BTU member important to you?**

Being a BTU member is important to me because of the protections it provides and how important it is to have strength in numbers. I have strong confidence in the BTU's ability to advocate for our benefits and contracts year to year.

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

I would just like to encourage anyone who is thinking about applying for Model to apply next year. Even if you don't submit a full portfolio your first year, it is really helpful to go through the domain sessions to learn more about the rubric and start gathering documentation you can submit the following year. It is a big time commitment and a lot of work, but it's so worth it to be rewarded for how hard we all work.

# BTU Member Shoutouts

- Shout out to **Mrs. Peterkin from the Empowerment Academy** for all of your support, guidance, and leadership to our middle school team!!! She does it all and it is appreciated!!! Thanks for leading our team!!
- Our **building rep, Theresa Leone**, has been working really hard to keep us informed and is doing an amazing job! We appreciate you!
- Shout out to the **Patterson High #405 ESOL Paras**! (From Deborah Knowles)
- My shout out goes to **ELE/Three's teacher, Lena Woods**. She is everything a teacher/coworker/friend should be. Too often the best teachers are not acknowledged for the exceptional work they do. (From her partner always)
- Thanks To **Megan Gammill** for helping me through some COVID scares, baking me brownies, and coming correct with a full-size Milky Way when I really needed it! I appreciate you.
- Shout out to **Amanda Shipley**, who is our fearless IEP chair and special educator who steps up into various roles on a daily basis. Amanda is kind but keeps it real. We love her, her sense of humor and all-round awesomeness. (From the Learning Lab team)
- I want to send a huge shout out to **Mrs. Childs, the first-grade teacher at Edgewood Elementary**. Thanks to her, my young scholar is so excited about school and he is pumped to read to me each night. She has made his transition back into the classroom so very positive!!! (From a thankful parent)
- Shout out to **Mrs. Cindy Fisher at Reach Partnership H.S** for always helping out your co-workers and establishing such a trusting and caring classroom environment. You rock! (From Ms. Pat Rose)
- **Coach Gregory Baugh**: you are a true example of a leader. Thanks for your leadership and for helping Special Educators navigate their way. You rock! (From Ms. Pat Rose)
- Shout out to **Mrs. Anita Snyder,** who is an amazing teacher and great testing coordinator. You rock! (From Ms. Pat Rose)
- Just want to shout out my girl, **Ms. Childs, over at Edgewood Elementary School.** I know how much she loves her students through her actions and hard work. She has a genuine spirit and truly loves the work that she does. She is one of those educators that will leave a lasting impression on anyone she meets.
- Shout out to **Akai Childs at Edgewood Elementary School #067!!** She is so dedicated to both her first-grade students and the staff at her school. She shines in the classroom as she goes above and beyond for her first graders. She really touched me as she went above and beyond to help create team spirit at our school by planning staff outings and activities to provide a community for teachers. For me she's the epitome of a model teacher as her work has led both her students and her peers to success! (From Claudia Liburd)
- Shout out to **Mrs. Childs, first-grade teacher at Edgewood Elementary,** for her creativity and compassion, providing an exceptional learning experience for her students! (From D. Millner)
- **Fred Lucas, Mervo**, is the consummate professional colleague and supportive friend reaching out to staff members. Thank you. (From Ms. Cushing)
- Shout out to **Ms. Nicolette Smith at Coppin Academy.** She is our faculty problem solver, blackboard expert, and committee goddess. We are so lucky to have her.
- Shout out to **Ms. Michele Harris**, for many years of dedication at Poly! Ms. Harris greets everyone in the main office and does so much to support students and other staff members. (From Caroline Schmidt)

guaranteed Rate

**Do they qualify?**

- Purchases only
- Must meet minimum FICO score requirements
- No first-time homebuyer requirement
- Available in all states (except for New York)
- Income limits apply and vary based on program

# Down payment assistance with fewer restrictions

## Introducing the Chenoa Fund program*

- 3.5% of the purchase price or appraised value, whichever is the lower amount, in the form of a 2nd loan
- Available in FHA loan options
- Can be forgivable if borrower meets certain requirements**

For more information about the Chenoa Fund program, please visit chenoafund.org or speak with your loan officer.
*This program is not available in New York.
**Based on a comparison of the borrower's household income to the county's median income.
Applicant subject to credit and underwriting approval. Not all applicants will be approved for financing. Receipt of application does not represent an approval for financing or interest rate guarantee. Restrictions may apply, contact Guaranteed Rate for current rates and for more information.

Tell your clients about this program! I'm here to answer any of your questions.

**Diana Lindsay**
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# PSRP Update

Upcoming PSRP Dates:

- PSRP wage increase of 2.25% should be on the December 10th paycheck, with retroactive pay to July 1st
- Clerical Committee: virtually, 3rd Wednesdays 5:15pm, email clericalcommittee@baltu.org for access
- PSRP Committee: virtually, 1st Wednesdays 4:30pm, email clericalcommittee@baltu.org for access
- Communications Committee: virtually, 4th Thursdays 5pm, email clericalcommittee@baltu.org for access

*At this year's Baltimore City Issues and Priorities Hearing, BTU PSRP Committee member Keysha Goodwin presented the following testimony on behalf of the committee. Her testimony was presented to the Baltimore City Delegation of the Maryland General Assembly and it is reprinted here.*

Dear Members of the Baltimore City Delegation,

My name is Keysha Goodwin, and I am a Pre-Kindergarten paraeducator at Johnston Square Elementary School, which serves the communities of Johnston Square, Greenmount West, Oliver, and Latrobe Homes and other families who wish to attend. I am a proud member of the Baltimore Teachers Union, and I come to you this evening representing our Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel Committee.

Many of you may have fond memories of some of the people who worked in your schools when you were little; it's possible that you might not know that those people were Paraprofessionals or School Related Personnel (PSRP). We are vital to public education, and we make a meaningful impact every day in every way.

PSRPs make an impact by:

- Making sure student and employee records remain confidential
- Resolving conflict between students
- Supporting students who need more academic help
- Being there when someone needs a hug, or needs to vent/confide in someone
- Keeping special education students safe and motivating them to stay on track, and helping all students access their academics
- Providing additional assistance to students who are learning English
- Helping our youngest students adjust to school with a nurturing and engaging experience
- And helping students and families get their needs met in the front offices.

Our school secretaries are the frontline resources for families and are an important guide for the entire school community; They are our time-keepers, record keepers, and information sources. And finally, PSRPs impact schools by supporting families as Community School Coordinators and Wholeness Specialists.

It's great that the Blueprint funding through Kirwan expands the impact of Community Schools with additional funding. But the Kirwan legislation neglected to include a very important part of the school community: PSRPs. While teacher salaries are increasing greatly to attract and support educators, Most PSRPs remain underpaid, and in many cases their wages/salaries are not even keeping up with inflation.

PSRPs feel disappointed and left out of Kirwan. Our question is: What happened? What can legislators do to put us in the legislation so that we get some relief? PSRPs are the difference between a school and a school community, and we are asking for the same respect and support as our teacher colleagues. We are professionals, but most PSRPs are working after school and weekend jobs just to make ends meet. Where is the disposable income for us? Too many PSRPs are stuck taking public transportation because many can't afford a vehicle. Some PSRPs live with their adult children because we need help paying bills. We can't afford to buy a house and pass it onto our children and grandchildren without becoming house poor. We deserve a living wage.

- A living wage means we want people to have affordable living. We deserve generational wealth - the same as everyone else, we want to be able to pass something on to our families. With the wages we are paid, we don't have the ability to do that.
- PSRPs spend our careers investing in our communities' most important resource, our children. We are asking legislators to fix the Blueprint this year by adding funding that increases wages for PSRPs. On behalf of the Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel Committee of the Baltimore Teachers Union, I thank you for your time and for allowing me the opportunity to speak today.

# Student editorial: BCPSS must take a stand against sexual assault

ASCBC
ASSOCIATED STUDENT CONGRESS OF BALTIMORE CITY

*By the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City*

Since the beginning of the school year, Baltimore City Public Schools has been increasingly engulfed in a #MeToo crisis, where allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct, and bullying became major points of conflicts to be addressed.

It seems that this started with a high school sophomore alleging that they were assaulted, and forced to transfer to another high school when their needs and claims were not sufficiently addressed by school administration. This person's story brought hundreds of students into the streets on September 15th - one of the largest student protests in recent district history. Walkouts took place at several Baltimore schools, most notably City College.

Several Instagram accounts specific to various schools around the City were also created to provide an avenue for people to come forward anonymously with claims of sexual misconduct to make their stories known to the public without fear of social retribution.

The stories that all of these individuals tell is compelling - and in large part implicates the school leadership to which these pleas are aimed. If every allegation is to be believed, our City has an epidemic of sexual harassment. Several schools seem to have employed a tactic of directing students who allege incidents to transfer to other schools. From what we have heard, some school officials have developed reputations for negative comments and selectively enforcing dress code policies that may sexualize students. This may force female students to develop insecurities and feel that their bodies are more important than their education.

With regards to administrative policy in relation to sexual harassment allegations, we have seen students have a general consensus and desire for new approaches to tackling these issues which impact so many young men and women in the school system.

The problems raised by these individuals need to be addressed - transferring students from one school to one another as a means of removing accusers needs to be changed.

If these efforts to combat sexual assault don't accept anonymous claims, the credibility of the investigations will be watered down.

This may make it more difficult to attain justice by setting a higher standard for the accuser than the perpetrator. Slow and ineffective investigative structures drag out any accountability for those involved, possibly delaying or even denying an ultimate verdict that can satisfy all parties.

Some schools, (like the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute) have made a response to this unfolding crisis by holding emergency school assemblies to announce modified systems for the submission and processing of sexual harassment, misconduct, and bullying reports.

As some students have noted, this response needs to be built upon to better solve the problems that have been and are continuing to be raised. Mainly, it needs to help ensure that these cases are addressed equally and to their fullest extent.

Another sophomore noted on Instagram that the administrative approach didn't seem "really genuine and didn't really implement any change." Prospective student government representatives have also mulled over the possibility of signing

onto a student counterproposal with the goal of better addressing contentious issues.

But ultimately, what is most needed for the student body is for the district to take student issues to the next level. More focus and more weight need to be put onto our words, so that we can live and laugh at ease. From what we believe, just as there is room for improvement in students, there is room for improvement in the measures taken so far. Greater transparency in these issues will help ensure that there is a strong relationship between fellow students and staff. Student matters of such importance should not be left unresolved and students shouldn't fear missing class because some staff members are more focused on what they wear.

The Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City is a civic student organization dedicated to this - advancing student issues with district leadership and giving the student body a voice on structural bodies like the School Board. Our sole purpose is to help support other Student Government Associations (SGAs) throughout the Baltimore City Public Schools community, and we are here to voice fellow student opinions and share new perspectives for the course of actions related to our schools and education.

One thing on which we have agreed is that this is an issue that needs to be better addressed by both school-based and district leadership, and we hope to see substantive action and genuine recognition of these matters taken in the following days. Silence will not bring change.

*Editor's note: In the interest of promoting authentic student voice, BTU made this space available to students for a topic of their choosing without restriction. We believe that their choice reflects their agency and the seriousness with which they take their leadership roles.*

# LUTHERVILLE-TIMONIUM MEDICAL CENTER

When it opens in January, the Lutherville-Timonium Medical Center will provide Kaiser Permanente members in Baltimore County with convenient access to a state-of-the-art facility offering nearly 30 specialties provided by award-winning[1] doctors. This next generation comprehensive medical center will feature new technology and designs to optimize the patient and care team experience.

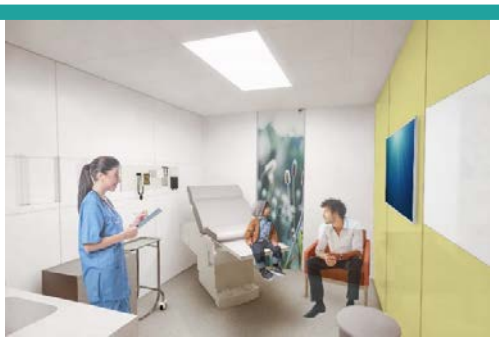
## FACILITY AT-A-GLANCE

- Address: 2391 Greenspring Drive, Timonium, MD 21093
- First patient seen: January 31, 2022
- 220,000 square foot facility will be the largest Kaiser Permanente medical center in Baltimore
- Will serve more than 16,400 Kaiser Permanente members in Adult Family Medicine and Pediatrics each year
- Will employ 300 staff members and 100 physicians
- The facility is expected to see over 175,000 visits per year
- The décor of the facility will feature local artists and the color-scheme will reflect the annual Preakness horse race jockey colors

## SERVICES[2]

- 24/7 Advanced Urgent Care unit with 34 beds
- 24/7 Radiology and Laboratory services, and extended weekday and weekend Pharmacy hours
- Ambulatory Surgery Center with 3 operating rooms and Outpatient Procedure Suite with 2 procedure rooms
- Primary care including Adult and Family Medicine, Ob/Gyn, and Pediatrics
- More than 30 specialties including several that are new to the North Baltimore area, like: Allergy, General Surgery, Hematology/Oncology (including infusion), Infectious Disease, Interventional Pain, Ophthalmology and Optometry, Pulmonology, and more

For more information about the facility, visit **kp.org/luthervilletimonium**.



[1]The physicians who practice at Kaiser Permanente are recognized as Top Doctors in Northern Virginia Magazine (2021), Washingtonian magazine (2021), and Baltimore magazine (2020). [2]The continued availability and/or participation of services at any facility cannot be guaranteed. For the most up-to-date information, visit **kp.org/facilities.**

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# AFSCME Maryland Living Wage Campaign

*By Patrice Pilgrim*

I remember moving to the United States of America in 2015. At that time, all I had in the way of qualifications was my high school diploma and more than 6 years of customer service experience. I had no familiarity with the structure of American society and how the job-hunting process went. Sure, I knew that finding a job would take time and that there would be stiff competition for each and every position. I had faith that I would find a job that would allow me to take care of my then 4-year-old son and the baby that was on the way.

When I got the call for my first American job - at Burlington Coat Factory, I was so excited. Finally, a job that would start me on the path to being able to take care of my family. I went to the office to sign my paperwork. In the course of that process, I asked "What will my hourly rate be?". I was told "$7.25 an hour". I did the math in my head - $7.25 per hour for 8 hours, which worked out to be $58 per shift. I worked six days a week and took home $348 - after taxes.

The average rent for an apartment in Baltimore in 2015 was $923. With an overall monthly take-home of approximately $1,044, I was not going to be able to afford an apartment on my own. Fast forward 6 years and my hourly rate has grown to the point where I can afford an apartment and all of the other responsibilities that come with having a family to take care of. My circumstances have changed, but for thousands of people in the City of Baltimore and throughout the State of Maryland, the minimum wage has not made any type of significant movement.

There is one organization that is pushing the state and other agencies to providing a 'living wage' for their employees in the present and future. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 3 represents more than 30,000 state and higher education employees in Maryland. With the active support of BTU, AFT Maryland, and other unions and community organizations, this group of warriors has been fighting for:

The override of Governor Hogan's Veto of SB 9: USM Consolidated Bargaining. Governor Hogan vetoed an important bill that consolidates bargaining across the University System of Maryland campuses under one contract. This bill will help provide equity for employees across campuses, and especially in our Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as currently, each individual campus is setting their own pay rates. There is a push for the General Assembly to override the veto during a special session and plans to begin negotiations with the USM for a master contract early next year.

Providing Funding for Annual Merit Increases: One of the best employee retention programs the state has is the annual merit increase. Merit increases can average around 2.3% and are required under state law for employees who receive satisfactory or above performance evaluations. Unfortunately, Governors rarely fund them. Gov. Hogan has only funded one merit increase in the seven years he has been in office. There are plans afoot to pursue a revenue source that will be dedicated towards the regular funding of merit increases for state employees.

Binding Arbitration: Currently, state employees have no meaningful way to resolve an impasse during negotiations. So if a Governor does not want to engage in serious contract negotiations, they can allow the clock to run out of time and essentially do what they want. Binding arbitration would allow for a neutral third-party arbitrator to be brought in upon impasse and evaluate the facts and offer a binding decision.

Collective bargaining for employees at the Office of the Public Defender. The core staff as well as line attorneys for the Office of the Public Defender are state employees. They do not have the same rights to collective bargaining or due process that similar state employees in other agencies enjoy through their union contracts. The pandemic served as a catalyst for long-standing issues in the OPD to come to light and unify workers. Hundreds of public defenders in Maryland have organized to form a union local under AFSCME. They are motivated to fight for collective bargaining so they can be better advocates for their clients. They must now pass legislation enabling collective bargaining.

A living wage means that a single parent working in a government office can pay the rent to keep a roof over the heads of their family. A living wage means that families do not have to choose between rent and food - they can afford both as well as the other things that come with caring for a family. A living wage connects to collective bargaining and union organizing and will ensure that the rights of all workers under that banner are afforded the benefits that will ensure that they can afford to adequately care for their families.

To find out more about the AFSCME MD campaign and what YOU could do to help continue to push this agenda forward for the 30,000+ workers, check out this link. Let's continue to be #UnionStrong and stand in solidarity with our AFSCME MD siblings!

## *PAID ADVERTISEMENT*

**Workers' Compensation and COVID – What You Need To Know**

Mandatory vaccines. Booster shots. Long haulers. Social distancing. For those of us returning to work in-person during the pandemic, these phrases are now integral components of our "new normal." As with any unique situation, application of existing laws to a developing landscape inevitably seems to create more questions than answers - at least initially. It is important for you to know your rights and the benefits to which you may be entitled, and how to best protect yourself as the law continues to evolve.

**Is COVID-19 Compensable Under Workers' Compensation?**

Unfortunately, the most definitive answer is "maybe." To be compensable, the claim would most likely be treated as an accidental injury, having to arise directly out of your employment. Causation is the key element of any potential claim. The burden will be on you to prove the connection between the job and the infection, and that the likelihood of contagion stemmed more from exposure to the disease at work as opposed to exposure during personal activities. As cases are determined on their individual merits and specific facts, meticulous journaling is essential to the success of any claim. You should keep a record not only of the onset of symptoms and initial diagnosis, but also regarding your whereabouts, contacts, and travels in the days leading up to the illness. The Workers' Compensation Commission will consider all circumstances surrounding each individual claim in determining causation, and ultimately, compensability.

**What Benefits May Be Available?**

When a COVID-19 claim is found to be compensable under Maryland's Workers' Comp system, the afflicted worker may be entitled to benefits normally associated with accidental work injuries: lost wages, medical treatment, compensation for permanent disabilities, and possible survivor benefits. For each benefit sought, it remains the burden of the employee to justify entitlement. Establishing causation and proving necessity will remain elements of the claim throughout, and are usually addressed through medical reports, diagnostic testing, and sometimes expert opinions.

**What If I Test Positive For COVID-19?**

In the context of a Maryland Workers' Compensation claim, it is important to immediately notify your employer of the test result. Document, in as much detail as possible, potential work exposures covering the 10-14 day period prior to the onset of symptoms. Additionally, log your own personal activities and contacts during the same time span, as that information will inevitably be questioned in a contested claim. Be certain to obtain more than just the test result. Ensure that your medical provider takes a full history of your symptoms, notes the relevant time frames, and additionally provides a diagnosis as to any other complications or issues secondary to the underlying COVID infection.

Due to COVID-19's highly transmissible profile and its ability to produce community spread, pinpointing exact sources of contagion could prove difficult, if not impossible. Nevertheless, employees who believe they were infected at work should not feel dissuaded from pursuing the Workers' Compensation benefits to which they are rightfully entitled. Detailed journaling, proper documentation, and sound legal guidance are all necessary yet achievable elements in bringing a successful claim. As we continue to learn of the long-term effects of this virus and its potential ramifications, it is essential that workers who may be entitled to benefits seek the protections afforded by our Workers' Compensation System – for themselves, their futures, and their families. Serious COVID-19 cases have had devastating effects not only on people's health, but in some instances their ability to continue with their careers. **All questions or concerns related to COVID-19 workers' compensation claims or any other work injuries may be directed to Daniel Udoff of Kahn, Smith and Collins, P.A. All inquiries are confidential and there are no legal fees unless we win your case.**

KSC KAHN SMITH & COLLINS, P.A.

**Daniel E. Udoff, Esq.**
**201 N. Charles Street, 10th Floor**
**Baltimore, Maryland 21201**
*udoff@kahnsmith.com*
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*www.kahnsmith.com*

# CANYON EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPANT

Canyon Educational Participant (CEP) is a Grand Canyon University program designed to benefit teachers, students, parents and leadership of charter and private schools through alliance scholarships, university program discounts, professional development and more.

## CEP STUDENTS RECEIVE:

- **SCHOLARSHIPS.** High school students who are fully admissible to GCU receive a minimum institutional award package of $2,800 per academic year with additional opportunities available to students who graduate from a CEP high school.
- **DUAL ENROLLMENT.** CEP high school students have the opportunity to reduce the time to complete a bachelor's degree from four years to three by taking dual enrollment courses during high school. These courses are offered at $52.50 per credit hour.

## CEP STAFF AND SPOUSES RECEIVE:

- **SCHOLARSHIPS.** Staff receive a 10% scholarship* providing savings toward tuition and fees for online undergraduate, graduate or doctoral degree programs along with non-degree single courses and continuing teacher education courses. Spouses and parents of students receive a 5% scholarship.**
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** Access to GCU's Canyon Professional Development services and applicable discounts including expert-led professional development, coaching, mentoring, consultation and strategic planning. All fee-based services are specifically customized to meet the needs and goals of our CEP participants.

## ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:

- **JOB BOARD.** Access to the GCU Online Job Board to post employment opportunities and search for applicants.
- **DISCOUNTS.** Discounts available to students and staff for a variety of events and camps held on campus.
- **15% SCHOLARSHIP.** Paraprofessionals and classified staff may also qualify for a 15% scholarship.† Contact your local counselor for more information.

**Other benefits may also be available as needs and programs are determined.**

GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY®

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Chantelle James
602-247-3791
Chantelle.james@gcu.edu
www.gcu.edu/counselor/Chantelle.James

*MOU 3066: This scholarship is only valid for applicants who are employees or members of a Canyon Educational Participant (CEP) member school or organization and submit a complete application to an online or evening program.
**MOU 3069 and 3070: This scholarship is only valid for applicants who are spouses of employees or parents of students of a Canyon Educational Participant (CEP) member school or organization and submit a complete application to an online or evening program.
†MOU 6266: This scholarship is only valid for applicants who are employed as classified staff or paraprofessionals at a Canyon Educational Participant (CEP) school and submit a complete application to an online or evening program.
Please note, not all GCU programs are available in all states and in all learning modalities. Program availability is contingent on student enrollment. Grand Canyon University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (hlcommission.org), an institutional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Important policy information is available in the University Policy Handbook at https://www.gcu.edu/academics/academic-policies.php. The information printed in this material is accurate as of SEPTEMBER 2021. For the most up-to-date information about admission requirements, tuition, scholarships and more, visit gcu.edu ©2021 Grand Canyon University 216OE0579

# BCPSS vaccine mandate sparks controversy

*By Michael Donaldson*

Issues stemming from COVID-19 have caused a great deal of division and derision amongst United States citizens. There has been domestic in-fighting at the national, as well as local, level around the reopening of schools and businesses, the necessity of wearing masks, and mandated vaccinations. These issues have been compounded by differences in political and ethical beliefs between individuals. Unfortunately, these heated issues have forced themselves into the hallways and classrooms of schools within the Baltimore City Public School System.

On or around the 20th of September, those teachers, paraprofessionals, service providers, and administrators who had remained unvaccinated received an alarming letter from North Avenue. The threateningly worded letter informed these employees that if they did not take the steps needed to be fully vaccinated, they would be put on administrative leave, receive harsh reprimands, and could face termination. The actual terminology of the letter reads thusly:

> "*You are hereby notified that failure to comply with this directive will constitute insubordination under Maryland Code Annotated Education Article 6-202(a). Additionally, such failure to comply will amount to misconduct under the City Schools Employee Handbook Section 10.17. You are hereby advised that City Schools may suspend without pay or terminate an employee for specific offenses, including insubordination and/or misconduct.*"

The deadline to remedy the situation was November 1st.

This letter and hardline approach have sparked some controversy within the system. Some staff believe that the vaccination mandate is an abuse of power, one which limits personal freedoms and liberties. One teacher who wished to remain anonymous (D.P.) refused to get the vaccination – even after the threat to her career was made. She stated that, "As Americans, our freedoms and rights are being challenged." She further stated that she did not trust the vaccine, felt that it was rushed, and noted that "those who are vaccinated are still coming down with COVID." She was so opposed to the forced vaccination that she was (and is) willing to be terminated over the issue, prepared for a life altering consequence.

Others within the school setting view the situation differently, arguing that a vaccine mandate is one step closer to eradicating the catastrophic impact of the virus on student wellness and education. A first-grade teacher, Jessica P., is one of those people. "I think it's great for [employers], such as North Avenue, to create a mandate in efforts to eradicate this virus. This is no different than mandating vaccines such as polio, MMR, and diphtheria for work and school."

As BTU president Diamonté Brown has said several times since her election, the BTU speaks on behalf of all its members. This article, therefore, is not intended to cause further division by taking a side in the matter or calling out those with whom ideological differences are present. The purpose of this piece is to shine light on the topic and to point out the potential pitfalls of terminating unvaccinated staff prematurely.

According to a data reported by the school district to the Maryland State Department of Education on November 11th, roughly 92% of staff have been vaccinated. Although this is the

state's 2nd highest rate of school staff vaccination, that still leaves 8% of staff unvaccinated and in danger of being removed from schools. Fortunately, as of this writing, several staff members who had received that notice at the end of September are still working.

This has eased some of the tension and concern in schools surrounding the issue since a mass termination of those who are not vaccinated would have been damning to schools. As readers are aware, Baltimore City has a high rate of teacher turnover, and it currently faces a teacher shortage. Simply put, there are already not enough employees to ensure that every student in the city is receiving instruction from a highly qualified individual.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to remain a serious issue in America (not to mention the increasing concerns around the cold and flu season), one cannot expect for the educators who are in the system to get through the entire school year unscathed and with perfect attendance. There are a limited number of substitutes available and if those unvaccinated were terminated in mass, it would not be long before their absences were felt at the school level in a very tangible way.

Without enough adult support in buildings, we would all succumb to environments that are significantly more challenging than they already are. Student engagement and achievement would take a hit. The frequency of severe misbehaviors would escalate. Staff morale and feelings of school safety would plummet.

Before the system decides to carry out the severe consequence of termination, it should generate a realistic plan to ensure that all schools remain fully staffed. Until that takes place, a kneejerk reaction to this unprecedented situation will only further hinder student progress.

# Upcoming BTU Events and Meetings

***For a complete list of committee meetings please visit the calendar on the BTU website***

**December 2021**
**Dec 1 - Half Day PD**
**Dec 6 @ 5:30pm - General Membership Meeting**
**Dec 8 - Half Day PD**
**Dec 9 @ 6:00pm - Executive Board Meeting**
**Dec 14 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Dec 20 @ 4:30pm - BR Meeting**
**Dec 24-31 Winter Break**

**January 2022**
**Jan 1 - New Year's Day**
**Jan 11 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Jan 12 - Half Day PD**
**Jan 13 @ 6:00pm - Executive Board Meeting**
**Jan 17 - Martin Luther King Jr Day**
**Jan 25 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Jan 26 @ 4:30pm - BR Meeting**

**February 2022**
**Feb 2 - Half Day PD**
**Feb 8 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Feb 10 @ 6:00pm - Executive Board Meeting**
**Feb 18 - PD Day for Teachers and PSRPs**
**Feb 21 - President's Day**
**Feb 22 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Feb 23 @ 4:30pm - BR Meeting**

**March 2022**
**Mar 2 - Half Day PD**
**Mar 6 @ 5:30pm - General Membership Meeting**
**Mar 8 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Mar 10 @ 6:00pm - Executive Board Meeting**
**Mar 16 - Half Day PD**
**Mar 22 @ 5:00pm - School Board Meeting**
**Mar 23 @ 4:30pm - BR Meeting**