



# A Decade of Boston School Reform:

## *Reflections and Aspirations*



**Produced by the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy**

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**About the Rennie Center**

The Rennie Center's mission is to develop a public agenda that informs and promotes significant improvement of public education in Massachusetts. Our work is motivated by a vision of an education system that creates the opportunity to educate every child to be successful in life, citizenship, employment and life-long learning. Applying non-partisan, independent research, journalism and civic engagement, the Rennie Center is creating a civil space to foster thoughtful public discourse to inform and shape effective policy.

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## **A Decade of Boston Public School Reform** *Reflections and Aspirations*

THE RENNIE CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH AND POLICY recently released a series of research reports on reform in the Boston Public Schools and convened a two-day meeting entitled *A Decade of Boston School Reform: Reflections and Aspirations*, to promote a conversation about school improvement in Boston, the key issues facing the system and the reform agenda for the next superintendent. Education leaders from Boston as well as from the state and nation descended on the JFK Library and Museum to reflect on the Boston Public Schools' progress over the past decade and the challenges and opportunities the district will confront in the future. This project was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Boston Public Schools has entered a period of transition with the recent retirement of Superintendent Thomas Payzant after nearly eleven years leading the district. Superintendent Payzant focused on consistent, district-wide reform initiatives with particular attention to improving instruction for all students. The leadership and focus of the Boston Public School district, unlike that of other urban districts throughout the nation, has remained remarkably constant over the past decade. Superintendent Payzant and his team have enjoyed unusually strong and steady support from the School Committee and the Mayor for more than ten years. As superintendent, Payzant developed and implemented a coherent set of strategies designed to boost school performance and student learning. His departure presents a unique opportunity to examine the progress of these reform strategies and distill lessons to inform future improvement efforts in Boston and in other urban districts throughout the nation.

The purpose of the Rennie Center's meeting was to promote a conversation, based on research, about existing reform efforts and the possibilities that lay ahead for the new superintendent. To this end, last winter, we commissioned a team of leading researchers, each with a national reputation as well as ties to the Boston Public Schools, to write a series of papers on key reform strategies that marked Payzant's tenure. Those papers were the centerpiece of the meeting.

In the opening session of the meeting on June 19, 2006, Rennie Center research director, Celine Coggins, set the stage for the conversation by presenting an analysis of the changes that have occurred in the BPS over the past ten years with respect to demographics, educational services, student achievement, graduation rates and college matriculation. Next, Warren Simmons of the Annenberg Institute and Norm Fruchter of New York University presented an overview and critique of the BPS reform strategy based on their research for the report *Strong Foundation, Evolving Challenges: A Case Study to Support Leadership Transition in the Boston Public Schools*. The evening concluded with remarks from Superintendent Payzant and a panel discussion led by Rennie Center president, Paul Reville, which included each of the evening's speakers.

Day two of the meeting, June 20, was designed to take a deeper look at key reform strategies of the Payzant era and encourage frequent participant feedback. Research papers were presented in the following pairs:

## **Human Capital Development:**

### *Building a Human Resource System in the Boston Public Schools*

Susan Moore Johnson and Morgaen L. Donaldson  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

### *Leadership Development at the Boston Public Schools*

Karen Mapp and Jennifer Suesse  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## **Instructional Improvement:**

### *Instructional Improvement in the BPS: 1996-2006*

Barbara Neufeld  
Education Matters

### *Using Data to Inform Decision-making in the Boston Public Schools: Progress and New Challenges*

Richard Murnane, Elizabeth City and Kristan Singleton  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## **High School Reform and Special Populations:**

### *The Road to Reform: Building a System of Excellent and Equitable High Schools in Boston*

Adria Steinberg with Lili Allen  
Jobs for the Future

### *Escaping from Old Ideas: Educating Students with Disabilities in the Boston Public Schools*

Ellen Guiney, Mary Ann Cohen and Erica Moldow  
Boston Plan for Excellence

Each pair of paper presentations was followed by panel discussions in which community leaders commented on paper recommendations. Each segment of the program concluded with small group discussions that engaged all stakeholders present in discussions of the papers as well as issues that were not covered by the research.

This document represents a compilation of the highlights of the research and the meeting discussions. Each of the research papers is summarized, and followed by a synopsis of the dialogue that it sparked. We highlight several additional reform topics that event participants identified as important before concluding with overarching themes for the new superintendent to consider.



# Human Capital Development

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### Building a Human Resource System in the Boston Public Schools

*Susan Moore Johnson and Morgaen L. Donaldson*

#### Abstract

In this paper, researchers Susan Moore Johnson and Morgaen L. Donaldson of the Harvard Graduate School of Education examined the efforts of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) to recruit, develop and retain high-quality teachers for all students. They documented the considerable progress that has been made in practices such as recruitment and hiring, and identified areas, such as teacher assignment and induction, which still require focused attention and improvement. The paper concluded with recommendations for how BPS' approach to human resources could be further strengthened in order to attract and retain the best possible teachers for Boston's public schools.

#### A Decade of Progress

Researchers Johnson and Donaldson highlighted the progress that the BPS has made with its initiative to “build a 21st century human resource organization”. BPS' efforts have resulted in a more coherent, streamlined and responsive approach that includes:

- Timely recruitment of and support for candidates,
- A promising in-district initiative to prepare its own teachers (the Boston Teacher Residency),
- Streamlined and expedited procedures for hiring and assigning new recruits that can lead to better matches between teachers and schools,
- A centralized induction program to support novices through their first year, and

- New roles for staff developers designed to support new teachers and to make a long-term teaching career in BPS more attractive and productive.

#### Ongoing Challenges

Though progress in these areas is evident, Boston's high attrition rate during the first three years of teaching reveals there are many challenges to address before the district can reach its goal of attracting, supporting and retaining a high-quality, diverse teaching force. Some of the major challenges highlighted in this report are:

- BPS continues to lose teachers of color, and Black teachers in particular, at a higher rate than White teachers.
- The district has little data about why teachers leave or where teachers go after the BPS.
- Induction programs, including the provision of mentors for all new teachers, are not being fully implemented.
- Teacher evaluation by principals is not occurring on a regular basis and is not consistent across schools. Thus, many teachers who are in need of assistance are not receiving it and teachers who are not effective are being granted tenure.

#### Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- Build and maintain a complete and current database to monitor staffing changes at district and school levels.
- Initiate school-based induction district-wide.
- Provide the training and support for principals to ensure that they can effectively hire, support, and evaluate new teachers.
- Address the problems of hard-to-staff schools.
- Develop diverse, classroom-based roles that teachers may assume as they build a career in teaching.

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### Leadership Development at the Boston Public Schools

*Karen Mapp and Jennifer Suesse*

#### Abstract

Researchers Karen Mapp and Jennifer Suesse explored the leadership development process enacted by the Boston Public Schools (BPS) during the decade-long tenure of Superintendent Thomas Payzant. This paper focused on the development of leaders at three key management levels: principals, middle managers at the central office and school levels, and senior district staff. Mapp and Suesse described the status of leadership development when Payzant joined the district in 1995 and analyzed the district's progress in this area. Next, Mapp and Suesse highlighted the BPS' current struggles and challenges with leadership development. The paper concluded with recommendations for the next superintendent focused on building the district's capacity for leadership development.

#### A Decade of Progress

Researchers Mapp and Suesse highlighted the progress that the BPS has made in leadership development over the past decade. Over the course of Payzant's tenure, a leadership development model emerged that focused on progress in the following areas:

- Developing leaders that were experts in instructional strategies;
- Establishing an organizational and reporting structure that fostered direct communication between school leaders and the superintendent and opportunities to identify principals and headmasters with strong potential;
- Hiring talented leadership staff with a balance of district insiders and outsiders; and
- Creating the School Leadership Institute, to support professional development programs for new school leaders.

#### Ongoing Challenges

Though progress in these areas is evident, there remain major challenges to address. Some of the challenges highlighted in this report were:

- The current approach to leadership addresses the “what” but not the “how” of leading instructional improvement.

- The conversion of the central office organization to support the improvement of classroom instruction is not yet complete.
- Insufficient attention is being paid to identifying and developing internal leadership talent across the district.
- An assumption exists that leadership development is something separate from the “work” of the district, which can therefore be delegated to external organizations.
- The core systems and attitudes necessary to support comprehensive and deliberate leadership development are limited in the district.
- Limited capacity exists to address the managerial and personal aspects of leadership development at scale.

#### Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- Develop an explicit strategy for leadership development that includes both line and support staff and complements the instructional reform.
- Provide professional development for central office staff to help shift their focus toward providing support for instruction at the classroom level.
- Increase leadership development capacity with a special focus on developing managerial and personal leadership skills.
- Develop new systems and attitudes for the supervision and support of principals, managers and teachers that enable succession planning, role shift, stretch assignments and meaningful evaluation.

## Synopsis of Discussion

The respondent panel and small group discussions that followed these two presentations focused largely on issues related to teachers, rather than leaders. The primary theme of the dialogue was the recruitment and retention of non-white teachers in the system. Minority teachers constitute little more than a third of the teaching force and that percentage has not improved over the past decade, though the student population is 86% non-white and growing more diverse annually.

Both panelists, Richard Stutman of the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and Barbara McGann of the Boston Public Schools, identified the dearth of non-white teachers as a problem that hinders the district's ability to be successful with diverse students. Stutman suggested research into the causes of minority attrition from the BPS and recommended that the BTU be highly involved in the district's strategies to diversify the teaching force. McGann, the BPS Human Resources Director, identified one such strategy: working with historically Black colleges to recruit undergraduate students to work in BPS summer school programs with the goal of attracting them to teach in the Boston Public Schools upon graduation.

Small group discussions reinforced the notion that minority recruitment and retention should be a top priority for the new superintendent. The challenges of keeping minority teachers in the system were linked to systemic problems such as the high cost of housing in Boston, the failure of most teacher preparation programs to train teachers for urban environments, and the lack of understanding of different cultures among many adults in the district.

Other topics related to human capital development that were raised by participants included:

- The need for better teacher evaluation by principals;
- The need for building systems to better support and evaluate principals; and
- The need for improved teacher compensation and opportunities for teachers to advance to leadership positions.







# Instructional Improvement

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### Instructional Improvement in the Boston Public Schools: 1996–2006

Barbara Neufeld

#### Abstract

In her paper, Barbara Neufeld of Education Matters discussed the transformation in instructional practice that the Boston Public Schools has undergone with the help of its key partner, the Boston Plan for Excellence. As a result of Thomas Payzant's tenure as superintendent, Boston school teachers now have a concrete instructional strategy that is system-wide. The district implemented Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL), a workshop model that maximizes student participation and learning. In this paper, Boston's theory of action for the CCL instructional reform model is examined along with the standards-based changes the district has made in instruction over the years. Neufeld also discussed the role CCL plays in whole school improvement in Boston.

#### A Decade of Progress

- The district has created and maintained a whole-school improvement agenda.
- The district was able to focus principals' and headmasters' roles on instruction within their schools by providing learning and training opportunities.
- There has been an establishment of a collaborative culture within the Boston Public Schools focused on instruction.
- The district has invested heavily in their coaches by providing regular professional development on a bi-weekly basis.

#### Ongoing Challenges

- *Implementation of Workshop Instruction.* The theory of workshop instruction is not completely implemented or understood in all Boston Public Schools.
- *Workshop-Related Challenges at the Small High Schools and Small Learning Communities.* Due to the district's focus on restructuring Boston high schools, instructional improvements have not yet become central to high school renewal.
- *Insufficient and/or Weak Principal/Headmaster Leadership.* Insufficient principal or headmaster leadership has impacted the implementation of instructional programs and the workshop model in schools.
- *Implementation of CCL in Literacy.* There has not been cross-school consistency when it comes to CCL implementation across the district.
- *Coach Allocation and Supervision.* Principals will now be responsible for hiring and supervising coaches for their schools. As a result, it is possible that such principals will redefine coaches' responsibilities and/or the organization of their work in ways that do not support the CCL model of coaching and/or the model of workshop instruction.
- *Schools without the Support of Coaches in Key Instructional Areas.* Because of the reallocation of resources, some schools within the Boston Public Schools will now be without coaches for the coming school year.
- *High Quality Coach Professional Development.* Professional development for coaches may shift to include generic coaching skills thought appropriate for all coaches regardless of the content area in which they work.

## Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- Review workshop instruction by school and pinpoint the areas of limitation, and create support strategies and accountability procedures to bring all schools to a high level.
- Determine which factors are negatively affecting instructional improvement and address them with scheduling and staffing allocations, among other actions and alternatives.
- Focus on the ways in which principals and headmasters lead the instructional improvement work, determine what types of professional development is needed, and create a level of accountability for school leaders.
- Conduct an analysis of the CCL model and work with coaches to determine what adjustments need to be made.
- Develop a specific job description and evaluation process for coaches and clearly define these parameters for principals and headmasters.
- Determine the key challenges schools will face without instructional coaches and create specific strategies to improve instruction through other means.
- Analyze coaches' knowledge, skill and future development needs along with the current design of coach professional development before creating a new system for professional development.

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

### Using Data to Inform Decision-Making in the Boston Public Schools: Progress and New Challenges

*Richard Murnane, Elizabeth City and Kristan Singleton*

#### Abstract

Student assessment results have been an important factor in the decision making process within the Boston Public Schools for more than a decade. According to researcher Richard Murnane of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and his team, Elizabeth City and Kristan Singleton, student assessment occurs within public schools for at least four reasons: there are state and federal testing requirements, leadership teams require assessment data in order to oversee achievement and accomplishments, student placement decisions need to be based on academic performance data, and instruction can be assessed by reviewing and analyzing students' achievement within certain skill levels. In this paper, Murnane and his research team discussed student assessments and the specific database systems and technical tools educators in the BPS have developed to inform different levels of decision-making. The paper concluded with some suggestions for next steps toward the goal of using data to guide instructional improvement.

#### A Decade of Progress

- Technical tools provided by the district have progressed over the past ten years.
- The district has consistently used MCAS data to make informed decisions.
- The district has created Benchmark Assessments for district educators.
- The district has developed mid- and end-of-year course specific exams for students.
- The supply of formative assessments for teachers has begun to increase with the creation of a bank of test items.

## Ongoing Challenges

- *Knowing what to do next.* The solution over the last five years has been to work on implementing reading and writing workshop and math curricula. The slow pace by which MCAS scores are improving shows that this is not enough.
- *Accountability for action.* In most schools, principals don't regularly monitor whether or not teachers are taking action as a result of examining data. This pattern is also apparent at the district level.
- *Assessing improvement.* While schools are much better at examining MCAS data to identify student learning problems, the MCAS system does not provide information on whether instructional changes have resulted in improved student skill levels and knowledge.

## Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- *Right Assessments.* Leadership needs to determine the next steps in building a comprehensive assessment system. There are two pressing assessment needs as the Boston Public Schools move forward: 1) more formative assessments that provide information for teachers to quickly assess student skill levels, and 2) assessments that measure growth in student skill levels.
- *Knowledge and Tools.* The correct tools used to assess student data have limitations: data are not currently stored in a flexible data warehouse that enables deep analysis, and student assessment patterns can only be analyzed through MCAS data. The district must consider whether it will invest in making its data analysis tool more robust or whether it will purchase a set of tools from an outside vendor. The district must also work to make data analysis tools available to central office personnel in order to promote better oversight of schools.
- *Better Decisions and Actions.* Additional support is needed to increase proficiency levels in reading, writing and problem solving for Boston Public School students. One suggested support is to provide schools with instructional coaches who can make sense of student assessment results *and* engage school faculties in conversations about how to bring about the requisite instructional improvements. District leaders must also address the challenges of offering meaningful support to schools with enormous variations in capacity.

## Synopsis of Discussion

The dialogue on the topic of instructional improvement began with Jeff Howard of the Efficacy Institute questioning whether Boston's reform strategy was too complex for teachers to own and develop a passion for. He called for a focus on adult proficiency and instructional improvement. Jacqueline Rivers of Math Power at Northeastern University expanded on the responsibilities of adults in the system. She urged the BPS to invest in building the cultural competence of all teachers and administrators, noting that an understanding of students' backgrounds is essential in motivating them to learn. Participants in several small group discussions reinforced the importance of cultural competence as an area in which BPS still needs to improve.

The bulk of the small group discussions focused on select findings from the research. The problem of uneven implementation of the workshop model was the topic of much conversation. The consensus was that the workshop model was difficult to implement well. Teachers who are new to the model need more training and support than they generally receive. Further concern was voiced because budget cuts have necessitated a reduction in the number of coaches for the 2006–07 school year, which will negatively impact support for teacher instructional improvement. The need for high quality professional development that extended beyond coaching was a recurrent theme.

Participants also seized on the systemic challenges of ensuring effective use of data at all levels of the system. The challenges of good data use identified by participants included:

- The need for many teachers and administrators to become proficient in interpreting test results;
- Teachers' need for support in using data to drive instructional change; and
- Adequate time to analyze results and discuss student performance with colleagues.

Again, professional development and coaching on the use of data were presented as strategies to improve adult proficiency.



## High School Reform and Special Populations

### SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

### The Road to Reform: Building a System of Excellent and Equitable High Schools in Boston

Adria Steinberg with Lili Allen

#### Abstract

Adria Steinberg and Lili Allen focused their research on the past ten years of high school reform under Superintendent Thomas Payzant. The Boston Public Schools offer students a variety of different high school settings across the district—small schools within a large high school complex, free-standing small schools, Pilot schools, large schools separated into smaller learning communities, exam schools, and alternative high schools run by the school district and community organizations. Steinberg and Allen examined the strategies used for high school reform in Boston, the challenges Boston Public Schools faced in converting large high schools into smaller schools, and made recommendations for the new superintendent for future reform and improvement.

#### A Decade of Progress

- Parents and students have a choice between several different high school models, all of which are geared towards offering a personalized learning environment and high-quality instruction.
- The district has created an Office of High School Renewal that spearheads new school development as well as reforms inside central office, and engages with outside partners to work with district leadership to steer the reforms.
- The district has adopted a new graduation policy to assist students, including those students who are over-age for grade, in meeting the requirements for graduation, and to allow curricular innovation while maintaining high standards for all.

#### Ongoing Challenges

- The process of converting high schools from large to small presents organizational and political challenges that must be addressed in order to create school cultures with a common vision for high-quality instruction.
- Levels of inclusion and educational achievement for Special Education and English language learner populations must be improved in Boston's high schools.
- Evaluations and assessments of the reforms are not as consistent as they should be in order to collect and analyze accurate information on reform progress and actions.

#### Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- *Keep the “Engines of Reform” Humming.* To continue the improvement of Boston's high schools, there needs to be continued central office reforms as well as ongoing collaboration between central office departments and the partner organizations that comprise the High School Renewal Workgroup.
- *Commit to a Dual Agenda of High Standards and Low Dropout Rates, and Develop an Early Warning System for Struggling Students.* The high school reform agenda must ensure that all students meet education requirements, and successfully graduate in four years. This will require a data system that can identify students who are falling off track and interventions that can help struggling students succeed in a challenging academic program.
- *Address the Equity and Excellence Challenges of a Choice-Based Portfolio of High Schools.* This includes ensuring that parents and students receive enough information to make an informed decision regarding high school choice; addressing student assignments in order to ensure equal access to quality education throughout all schools in the district; and creating a data system to accurately monitor students throughout the district.

## Escaping from Old Ideas: Educating Students with Disabilities in the Boston Public Schools

*Ellen Guiney, Mary Ann Cohen and Erica Moldow*

### Abstract

In this paper, Ellen Guiney, Executive Director of the Boston Plan for Excellence, examined the ways in which the Boston Public Schools has addressed the needs of students with disabilities. The paper focused exclusively on the needs of the 85% of students with disabilities in Boston who do not have a readily identifiable disability (such as blindness or deafness). Guiney began by documenting the current status of students with disabilities in the BPS. Next, the paper described ongoing challenges as well as areas of progress that exist throughout the district. The paper concluded with recommendations for how BPS might address some of its current problems and improve the quality of special education across the district. The central thesis of the paper was that despite good intentions and significant expenditures, the way BPS is educating students with disabilities is not getting them the education they deserve, and BPS—and the state—must escape from an emphasis on compliance and the use of special education as a place to put any student with difficult behavior and/or learning problems.

### A Decade of Progress

According to Guiney, the district has begun to focus on the issues specific to special education students. Some of the improvements made in the past few years include:

- The district initiated a pilot program where students are screened (in some cases every student in a class) and matched with services that specifically address each student's needs;
- Special education has been moved to the office of the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning to ensure greater coordination; and
- A district-based Evaluation Team Facilitator position was created, which improved the process for designating a student as eligible for special education services.

### Ongoing Challenges

Guiney outlined the status of special education and highlighted the following key issues associated with the implementation of special education in the BPS:

- Too many students are designated to special education and relegated to separate classrooms, and too many special student populations are overrepresented by gender and race. For example, one in three black male students are enrolled in special education, as compared with only one in eight white females.
- Too many students with learning or behavioral difficulties, not disabilities, are designated to special education.
- The costs of special education are too high for too few results.

### Recommendations for the Next Superintendent

- Refocus from referral to prevention and get reading instruction right.
- Create a reading course for high school and middle school non-readers.
- Expand well-designed inclusion classrooms so that permanent labels don't compound students' difficulties.
- Reconsider special education teacher certification.
- Review the practice of placing many students with disabilities and many kinds of programs in a single school.
- Revise the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process, which is part of the problem and potentially part of the solution.

## Synopsis of Discussion

The research presentations on high school reform and special education received a critical reception from the respondent panelists. Caprice Taylor Mendez of the Boston Parent Organizing Network focused her remarks on the progress of high school reform. Her commentary centered on the question of whether high schools are doing enough to meet the needs of minority students, many of whom are English language learners. She concluded that the current emphasis on restructuring schools was inadequate and that more attention should be paid to the dropout rate and college matriculation.

Jerry Mogul of Massachusetts Advocates for Children critiqued the recommendations of the special education research. While Guiney had called for a radical overhaul in the way special education students are identified and educated, Mogul argued for better implementation of the current rules. He noted the Mason and Murphy elementary schools in Boston as examples of facilities that meet the needs of special education students well.

Small group discussions followed the themes of the respondent panel. Many participants were concerned that tensions between communities of color and the BPS were not sufficiently highlighted in the research on high school reform. They wanted to see teachers and administrators take more responsibility for dropouts and identify at-risk students earlier.

Discussion of the challenges of educating special education students began with many expressing concern about the disproportionate numbers of non-white students in special education. Others reiterated the importance of distinguishing between learning disabilities and behavioral problems. Solutions offered by participants included:

- Doing more to integrate special education teachers with the regular teaching staff;
- Creating better avenues for parental involvement and parent education about the special education system; and
- Placing emphasis on inclusion as an effective strategy for a greater number of students.





## *Additional Topics that Emerged at the Meeting*

In choosing topics for this project, the Rennie Center sought to examine key elements of Boston's reform strategy. However, we were not attempting to be comprehensive in researching every topic that has been important to reform in Boston. In small group discussions and on feedback forms, all participants were encouraged to raise additional topics that warrant consideration by the new superintendent. This section focuses on topics which were not explicitly included in our research, but were raised as concerns by meeting participants.

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

The BPS has implemented several strategies for engaging parents and community members in school improvement over the past decade. Superintendent Payzant instituted a cabinet-level position for family and community engagement, and has helped the system to make connections to students' home circumstances in several additional ways. Yet, many feel that parents and the community continue to be underrepresented in BPS decision-making. They feel the community should be playing a leadership role in education, particularly the education of minority students. The following were suggested as methods of better engaging families and the community:

- Getting more easy-to-understand data on student performance into parent's hands;
- Obtaining parent and student perspectives on reform issues on a more frequent basis; and
- Clarifying to parents how they can/should be involved in the schools.

In response to participants' call for more attention to the issue of parent and community engagement, the Rennie Center has

commissioned the Harvard Family Research Project to research and write a chapter on the topic to be included with our other BPS research in a book being published by the Harvard Education Publishing Group.

### **The Achievement Gap**

Like most districts across the nation, Boston has a substantial gap in achievement between the test scores of Black/Hispanic students and White/Asian students. This gap exists across all subject areas and grades. Despite the school system's goal to narrow and, in time, eliminate the achievement gap, it persists. Test scores demonstrate that over the eight years that the MCAS has been given, gaps have only diminished slightly, and they have only diminished in a small number of testing areas. Overall, the achievement gap is as large a problem today as it was ten years ago.

Participants expressed frustration at the lack of success the district has had with Black and Hispanic students. Many believe that the district has not done enough to address the related challenges of race, class and poverty. The need for greater levels of cultural competence among all adults in the system was reiterated as an essential part of the solution. Group members called for more research and intervention to better understand the impact of:

- The growing population of Hispanic students in the BPS system;
- The recent rise in youth violence in the city of Boston; and
- Recent legislation mandating English immersion for non-native English speakers.

## External Partnerships

External partnerships with local universities, community organizations, and health services have been a critical element in Boston’s reform strategy over the past decade. Participants sought to see these partnerships strengthened in the future and identified ways that partners could play a greater role in BPS success in the coming years. They hoped to see:

- A more integrated approach to teacher training in which higher education faculty become more invested in individual schools within BPS;
- A greater effort to improve school climate; and
- Increased connections to health and human services organizations in order to provide a complete “safety net” for all children.

In sum, participants agreed that the six research topics that framed the event would be key areas of focus for the next superintendent, but they felt that closing the achievement gap, strengthening partnerships, and encouraging family and community involvement were equally important.







## Conclusion

We conclude by pointing out some of the overarching themes that cut across each of the research papers as well as the event discussions. There is strong support for continuing the reform strategies initiated over the past decade, though there should be heightened attention to equity issues and a greater intensity in the pace of change.

Payzant's legacy is one of effective reform initiatives that have left Boston well-prepared for the next phase of district-wide improvement. With the cultural and structural foundations put in place by Payzant, the next superintendent has the platform to initiate a more aggressive agenda. Evidence from this project suggests that the incoming administration should concentrate its reform efforts on 1) continuing effective strategies like instructional workshops, more efficient hiring practices and high school improvement, while deepening these efforts and accelerating the pace; 2) insisting on equity by making sure that instructional reforms penetrate to all schools and that teachers, resources and curriculum match the challenges present in each school; and 3) intensifying the focus on results, especially for students of color, English language learners and students with disabilities. Boston's sustained leadership and consistent progress leave the district poised to see break-through progress, but only if it accelerates and intensifies its work in these key areas and stays focused on success for all students.

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BOSTON'S SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP AND  
CONSISTENT PROGRESS LEAVE THE DISTRICT  
POISED TO SEE BREAK-THROUGH PROGRESS,  
BUT ONLY IF IT ACCELERATES AND INTENSIFIES  
ITS WORK . . . AND STAYS FOCUSED ON SUCCESS  
FOR ALL STUDENTS.

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Thomas Payzant concluded his tenure in the Boston Public Schools with a national reputation for effective district-wide reform and unmistakable indications of progress during his reign. As the dawn of the next era of Boston education reform approaches, the Rennie Center's research and deliberations emphasize that there is much left to be done to capitalize on the good work that Payzant initiated, to ensure that reform is equitably implemented and to accelerate reform progress to a relentlessly ambitious pace so that Boston's school improvement strategies truly and quickly benefit all students.







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