

The Honorable Thomas M. Menino

Address to the Boston College CEO Club

June 9, 2009

It's great to be with my friends at the CEO Club. You are an impressive group – as Peter says – the best in the country. You all play an important role in our city, and you drive Boston's economy.

You might think I am going to talk about the economy, and I am – but not in the way you might expect. I am going to talk about a critical part of our education system: our public education system.

Just two weeks ago, I was in this room with another impressive group, the future leaders of our city. I am talking about the Boston Public Schools' 38 Valedictorians.

They come from places like the Dominican Republic and Dorchester, Somalia and West Roxbury, China and East Boston. Now, they are heading to places like Harvard and UMass Boston, Columbia and BU, MIT and, of course, Boston College.

Today, I want to talk about the school system we created for them, and how we're transforming it for the future.

Already, we have come a long way. In the early '90s, seven of our public schools were losing accreditation. Parents were leaving the district, and our schools were headed in the wrong direction.

So we took action. We invested in early childhood education, creating full-day kindergarten for 4 year olds. We closed underperforming schools and opened the pilot schools and the K-to-8 schools parents want. We doubled our afterschool programs and expanded extended learning time. And together, we created the best summer jobs program in the country.

The results are real. Applications for kindergarten are up 10 percent. Our district has one of the highest college enrollment rates of any city in the country. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked 8 of our high schools among the nation's best.

But being among the nation's best is not good enough for me, because it's not good enough for the children of Boston.

Although we've made tremendous gains in the Boston Public Schools, I am frustrated with the pace of our progress, especially in our low performing schools. And I am not alone.

Just this spring, Superintendent Johnson, the School Committee and I have met with

thousands of parents. They know we have some great schools, but they want more of them – and so do I.

To get the results we seek – at the speed we want – we must make transformative changes that boost achievement for students, improve quality choices for parents, and increase opportunities for teachers.

I am thrilled that we have partners in Washington who share this belief. I have met with President Obama and Secretary Duncan. Let me tell you, it feels great to have both a President and an education secretary who understand what urban education is all about. They know it's about giving all kids a fair chance to live the American dream.

That's what we do in the Boston Public Schools. We have programs for families with autistic children, for students passionate about the arts, a Newcomers Academy for recent immigrants, and schools that connect kids to Boston's growing professions.

No matter what challenges a child, no matter what inspires a child, we educate everyone, but I believe we can achieve real results even better and even faster.

There are two reforms that I want to talk about today that will accelerate our progress. First, we need to empower our educators to quickly innovate and implement what works. Second, we need to strengthen the link between teachers' work and student performance.

To achieve these things, our schools need greater flexibility – flexibility in hiring, budgeting and staffing, in the way teachers collaborate, and in the hours kids are in school. That's why I am filing state legislation to create a new form of in-district charter school. Let me tell you how these schools differ from some of the current options.

They will be established solely by the School Committee, so we can quicken the pace of reform. The staff can unionize, but no union sign-off will be required to create these schools. They will have more flexible work rules so that schools can attract and retain the best teachers, and the school day can be tailored to students' needs. They will provide lessons for the whole system, but will be designed specifically to turn around our lowest performing schools.

Each school will be held accountable to performance contracts. If they aren't working, we'll shut them down. When they are working, we'll replicate them.

The students at our in-district charter schools will reflect the diversity – the strength – of our city, and their creation will improve educational opportunities for all children – at every school – not just our low-performing schools.

I will work hard with my partners on Beacon Hill to pass our bill by the end of this

legislative session.

But if that does not happen, I am prepared to support another way forward – I will call for lifting the cap on charter schools. Let me be clear: charter schools are not a magical cure-all for public education. There are excellent charters, just as there are underperforming charters; and there are excellent traditional schools, just as there are underperforming traditional schools.

I believe that the increased flexibility that charters provide can yield even better results – helping us close the achievement gap, improve programs for students learning English, and provide all children with an excellent education.

We need to try new things, and we need to implement them now to get the results we want for all of Boston’s children. That’s what all of us care about – principals and parents, business leaders and teachers.

I know you all remember that special teacher or principal who taught you to think critically, sparked your imagination and challenged you to work harder. I know the Boston Public Schools are filled with these kinds of educators.

Last night, we recognized 9 of them at our annual Educators of the Year event. We gave them awards. Now, let’s give them rewards.

I believe we should connect educators’ work with student achievement and reward people for classroom results.

Today I am proposing to introduce performance pay to the Boston Public Schools. I want to reward teams of educators who achieve significant results in the classrooms of our lowest performing schools. These teams will jointly be accountable for their students’ results, fostering greater collaboration.

Performance pay will help accomplish what we all want: attracting more excellent educators to our school system and rewarding them for the results their students achieve. I look forward to working with all stakeholders to make this important reform a reality.

I am under no illusion that any of these game-changing reforms will be easy, but they are an important part of my administration’s comprehensive approach to education – an approach that surrounds children with educational opportunities from dawn to dusk, from birth to college graduation.

Implementing these reforms will take resources, and we’re not the only administration that is advancing school reform, even in this difficult financial climate.

The Obama Administration wants to support these types of reforms. The President and

Congress have set aside \$5 billion in competitive grant money through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

President Obama and Secretary Duncan have told me they want to invest in reforms that turn around low performing schools, improve teacher effectiveness and prepare all kids for college success.

We have been pursuing these reforms and will seek these federal resources to take our schools to the next level. We can only do this because of the strong leadership of Superintendent Johnson, and our great principals, headmasters, teachers, parents and staff. They work hard for our children every day. They deserve our heartfelt thanks.

Boston has proven it's a place where real transformation like our education reforms can happen. Behind you stands a ribbon of parks that not long ago was a congested, hulking highway. In front of you is the Boston Harbor and its islands. Once a punch line of a joke, now they are a pristine public park.

Transformation is what we do. Innovation is who we are.

We know how to work together to move our city forward. Together, we preserved an appointed School Committee. Together, we created the Boston Medical Center. Together, we built a world-class convention center. Together, we will transform our schools with our charter school legislation and performance pay.

I need you to fight for this legislation. I need you to demand performance pay. I need you to expand your commitment to summer jobs, putting kids to work right now. Above all, I need you to be strong advocates for excellent education for every school child.

Boston is the birthplace of public education. Boston is a leader in education, and with your help, we can make Boston the very best in education.

Thank you. Now, let's get back to work.