

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

May 2, 2011

Greetings to the Boston Public Schools Community,

As we approach the final two months of the school year and administer end-of-year course exams, I wanted to thank you for the hard work you have done to improve all of our schools, and for sharing a collective vision for educating all of our children.

There is a reason BPS was named one of the “most improved school districts in the world” in a global study this winter. There is no silver bullet. By working together, in sustained and urgent action, we are rapidly improving all of our schools. This is the mission of the five year **Acceleration Agenda**, our ambitious student-focused plan to improve academic quality, increase graduation rates and close access and achievement gaps. We must continue working together to keep making progress and decisions that will best serve our students.

In the last four years, we have:

Raised the graduation rate every year, even as we have raised standards for every student. Our graduation rate stands at its highest level since measurements began;

Lowered the drop-out rate to its lowest level in nearly 30 years;

Launched 11 **Turnaround Schools** to rapidly improve our lowest-performing schools;

Continued to strengthen the programs that have helped our students **close achievement gaps** in fourth grade reading. Boston’s students are scoring significantly higher and achievement gaps are significantly smaller than the average in other large cities;

Opened a **Re-engagement Center**, which has helped more than 600 off-track students and former students re-enroll and earn a high school diploma;

Opened a **Newcomer’s Academy** for students new to the United States;

Dramatically improved communications with families and programs for **students with special needs**;

Identified 5,200 current students who need more help learning English, opened a new two-way bilingual program and nearly doubled the number of teachers licensed to teach **English Language Learners**;

Added weekly **arts and music** experiences for 9,000 more students;

Increased advanced placement enrollment and made an **Algebra I** class available for 8th graders in all middle schools;

Created **In-District Charter Schools**, an **Innovation School**, opened a Montessori School and two International Baccalaureate High Schools;

Increased enrollment in our highly-chosen **four-year-old** and NAEYC-accredited programs;

Developed family curriculum guides and launched **Parent University**, which has empowered 1,500 parents to become more involved in their child's education;

Added **Acceleration Academies** and worked with partners to increase summer programs and opportunities for scholar-athletes and health and physical education classes;

Distributed **laptops to every teacher** and increased "technology goes home" access;

Expanded our highest-performing schools to make room for more students.

None of this has been easy and together we have done all of these things despite a punishing recession. We have protected teachers, launched anti-bullying efforts, created a Health and Wellness initiative, extended learning time, and we are renovating and repairing school buildings all across the city.

Most importantly, we are closing achievement gaps – but much work lies ahead. In 10th grade, we have virtually eliminated the racial gaps in English Language Arts and Mathematics that have persisted for years, but only in passing rates. We must continue to focus on helping *all* students excel, not just get by.

The Boston Public Schools are better today than they have ever been because we have a high performing team of great teachers and school leaders, great schools, engaged students and caring families, active business, higher education and community partners, and great Mayoral and City Hall leadership with a committed and dedicated Boston School Committee, all focused on children's success.

As we celebrate our success, we must also recognize that many challenges persist. Together, we must address and resolve the achievement gaps that keep our graduation rates below 80 percent and stand in the way of our students achieving the highest standards. We see the possibility of a new collective bargaining agreement that will give

our students and staff the time they need and honor our teachers with professional development that strongly supports instructional quality.

Last week, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with a group of teachers from across BPS after school in the Madison Park cafeteria to hear their concerns and discuss some of the many changes underway in our classrooms. This conversation marked the beginning of a spring listening tour, which will help us all understand where we stand as a community. The next day, I was honored to sign a contract extension with the Boston School Committee to remain Superintendent of Boston Public Schools over the next four years, and I am confident that with your support and continuous feedback, our students will succeed.

We were honored last month to host President Barack Obama at TechBoston Academy and listen to the inspiring speech he delivered in the gymnasium. He told our students:

“This is a place where everyone gets the chance to succeed, where everybody should have a chance to make it. The motto of this school is, ‘We rise and fall together.’ Well, that is true for America as well. If we want to prosper in the 21st century, and if we want to keep the American dream alive in our time, then we’re going to rise together. We’ve all got to come together.”

Just a few days ago, President Obama named yet another BPS teacher as one of the nation’s best in science instruction. We congratulate Wai Chin Ng, of the Josiah Quincy Elementary School, for winning the 2010 Presidential Award for Science. Only 85 teachers around the country received this honor this year, and yet, BPS teachers have repeatedly been placed in this Presidential tier. Last year, Sharon Hessney at the O’Bryant received an award, and two years ago, one went to Erin Flynn at the Philbrick.

What a wonderful way to begin Teacher Appreciation Week in Boston. Our teachers have our profound respect and we are so grateful for the difficult and important work they undertake every day. When he addressed our students, President Obama urged all of us to put the needs of our students at the forefront of everything we do. We must come together and all sides must be willing to change if our students are to succeed. This is the mission that our School Committee affirmed in the Acceleration Agenda one year ago. I am grateful and honored to continue to work with you as we make this exciting and important journey together.

Deeply humbled and appreciative,



Carol R. Johnson

Boston Public Schools Superintendent