

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

September 12, 2011

Dear Boston Public Schools family,

Welcome back to school! We hope you had a fun and productive summer. Today, as the weather cools down, it's time to focus on some big things happening in the Boston Public Schools.

You'll notice lots of changes that will make learning and working in BPS better. Our students and staff are already buzzing about our **better-tasting, fresher and more nutritious meals**. Through the very hard work of our Food and Nutrition Services team and a new contractor, we have made major improvements that our students are seeing every day.

Our changes go beyond the cafeteria. Our **Health and Wellness** Department has new staff and a new mission – to dramatically expand physical education, health education and nutrition awareness. A few months ago we invited a leading figure in Boston's arts community to help lead our **Arts Expansion Initiative**. Working with our partners, nearly ten thousand more students will receive weekly arts and music experiences than last year. Our schools are also safer. Because of the efforts of staff and students, as well as our new Code of Conduct and specific prevention-based approaches to problem-solving, **we have cut disciplinary incidents by more than half**.

This year we will also launch a new **Literacy initiative** and kick off a campaign to encourage our youngest students to discover the joy of reading. Students can struggle if they do not have a solid early foundation in literacy. This reveals itself in many unfortunate ways. A third grader who is frustrated in class might be absent a few times a month, an early sign of trouble. Statistics show that elementary students who regularly miss school stand just a one in five chance of ever graduating from high school. Boys are more likely than girls to drop out; and African American boys are at the greatest risk of all.

It is within our power to change this. Our five-year **Acceleration Agenda** puts a greater focus on closing the access and achievement gaps that still exist for too many students in too many schools and in too many communities.

Our mission is simple: All our schools must offer the same opportunities our best schools already do. A school like Orchard Gardens K-8, which is both a Turnaround School and a Pilot School and has staffing flexibility to choose the right teachers for every classroom, offers four more hours of instruction every single day to sixth graders than a traditional BPS school, and we work with teachers and community partners to do it. This is equal to six months of extra instruction per student per year. All of our schools should be able to extend their school days and all of our teachers should have more time to plan and prepare. This is what we are working on in our negotiations for a stronger teachers' contract, just as we are improving the way we support our teachers and school leaders.

With new strategies for science, mathematics, technology, literacy, teacher quality and tutoring, BPS is preparing all our students for college completion and career success. Our students and staff deserve the best. We are proud to have some of the highest-paid and best-supported teachers in Massachusetts and the nation; we are proud that we are making progress with our English Language Learners and have the best special education team in the country; and we are proud that we are doing more to welcome our students and parents. We want them to always have a seat at the table in school-based decision-making. It is for these reasons and more that BPS was just named one of the most improved school districts in the world.

Our parents have always been at the forefront of our efforts to improve Boston's schools. We look forward to working closely with you as we begin another wonderful year educating our city's children.

Sincerely,

Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent

Back-to-School Hotline: (617) 635-9046

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