

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Testimony of Superintendent Carol R. Johnson
In-District Charter School Bill
Education Committee Hearing, July 21, 2009

Chairman O'Leary, Chairwoman Walz, members of the Committee, I am Carol Johnson, Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools. Thank you for inviting us to speak on this very important topic of increasing excellence and opportunity for all of Boston's children.

Let me begin by saying that I am honored to serve the children of Boston and tremendously grateful to work with Mayor Thomas Menino, someone who is deeply committed to the education of all Boston's children and who is willing to seek innovative approaches to the achievement gaps that exist between some of our students. Our Mayor is truly committed to making sure that we educate and serve not just *some* but *all* of our community's students.

Mayor Menino has invested in giving our youngest learners a good and early start, and under his leadership and that of my predecessors, Superintendents Tom Payzant and Mike Contompasis, we offer students and families an array of school choices, including pilot schools, Horace Mann Charter, and small high schools. The Boston Teacher Residency program has allowed us to recruit a stronger and more diverse teaching work force, our students' MCAS passing rates have increased, and this year we have expanded what works by increasing capacity at the Young Achievers Pilot School in Mattapan and TechBoston Academy in Dorchester. We have aggressive target goals to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates, but despite this progress, achievement gaps still persist.

So today I come before you in support of the Mayor's bill to give the Boston School Committee the authority to create in-district charter schools. This legislation would give us the flexibility and the power to transform our persistently lowest performing schools and support our efforts to put a team of great teachers and leaders together to focus on results and do whatever it takes to ensure that every child every day in every school is not only college-bound but also college-ready.

In order to be transformed into centers of excellence, our persistently low-performing schools must be given the freedom to break the mold to help students reach their full potential. These schools may adopt an innovative new curriculum. They may choose to extend the school day, in order to provide students with more learning and enrichment time. They may choose to realign their resources in order to invest in the people and programs that best meet the needs of students. In their current form, these schools cannot exercise any of these options. They are crippled by the *status quo*, unable to make dramatic improvements on behalf of kids.

Boston Public Schools has a long tradition of being on the forefront of innovation. Over the last decade we have put more decisions in the hands of educators at the local level through our pilot schools, and families have actively embraced their efforts to inspire. We have gone from nineteen pilots in 2004 to twenty-four pilots today, including three new pilots opening this September. These schools continue to show long-term promise. However, over the last few years, expanding the number has been met with resistance.

This legislation is different in a number of key ways:

- 1) Focuses on our persistently lowest performing schools;
- 2) Impacts more directly English Language Learners and special education students who are highly represented in these schools
- 3) Focuses on the achievement gaps throughout the district
- 4) Puts the maximum authority and flexibility in the hands of the local governing body, the School Committee, and creates a performance contract that provided the School

Committee and the district a last-chance effort for the district to intervene and self-correct prior to a state takeover.

No doubt you will hear from many voices through the Commonwealth, representing diverse views on this bill. We recognize that these are not easy public policy decisions. It is critical, however, that we as a school community have all the tools necessary at our disposal to ensure that all, not just some of Boston's children are well served.

Finally, let me suggest that this bill is not meant to be anti-labor; in fact we look forward to continuing our work with the Boston Teachers Union president Richard Stutman and his team. We do believe that this bill does put children's education success as the top priority and our highest value.

I would like to close with the words of President John F. Kennedy, who said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource."

I thank you for listening and for all you do to strengthen and ensure a quality education for all children.