

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

November 17, 2009

To all BPS Staff:

I hope you are having a productive and enjoyable school year. Over the past year, we have been listening to the community, reviewing our student performance data, and looking at models of excellence, both internally and externally. Parents have clearly expressed that they want every school in every neighborhood to be a school of quality, and we are working to meet that challenge. We continue to make strides in our efforts to achieve proficiency for all, close access and achievement gaps, and graduate all of our students college ready. We know that these gains are the result of great teachers and school leaders working with students, families, and our community partners to address the individual needs of learners.

It is easy to point to pockets of excellence across the city. What we seek is a community where all schools excel. This Wednesday, November 18, we will present to the Boston School Committee a five-year strategic road map for how we will collectively achieve our Acceleration Agenda goals and targets. As a result of feedback from many of you, along with our stakeholders, we have made some revisions, and recalibrated the timeline from 2009 to 2014, setting even higher expectations for ourselves and for our students. You will be able to access the full proposal, as well as the Revised Academic Goals and Targets, via our website (www.bostonpublicschools.org/agenda) beginning Thursday, November 19.

One of our key strategies for improvement is to **replicate success and turn around low performing schools**. Replicating success involves identifying and learning from the schools, programs, and practices that have produced accelerated achievement. Turning around our low-performing schools requires us to make data-driven decisions around where to direct special attention.

Through our analysis of student performance, we have identified an initial group of fourteen schools that require a very focused set of interventions. These schools will develop a customized action plan so that we are able to focus on the specific learning needs of their students. We know that one size does not fit all, and we expect to work with the staff, families, and community partners as we consider the change that will be necessary. All of us must be prepared to change, innovate, and be flexible in ways that are far from business as usual.

Many of you may feel disappointed that your work so far has not resulted in more of our students performing at the proficiency level. This plan for intervention may even unintentionally send the message that your work is not valued or appreciated. On the contrary: We understand the challenges you face and the time and energy you devote. However, we all own these results. While it is important to celebrate success, we must confront our persistent achievement gaps and low graduation rates. And while we know

that the work in your school buildings is challenging, we must insist on not just great effort, but strong outcomes for our students.

If your school is among the select group identified for turnaround, you will receive more information over the next few weeks regarding next steps. We will be holding school community meetings to gain your input and insights, and look forward to these conversations.

Many of our schools in need of the most focused intervention are concentrated in specific communities within the city. The students and families in these communities are often faced with challenges that extend beyond the classroom and require the collective support of our community members. We are referring to this area of high need and even higher potential as the “**Circle of Promise.**” We envision a community of stakeholders creating a circle of support around these families and students that is connected to schools, but also addresses the broader array of needs that become barriers to student success. We will need our faith-based, business, and non-profit partners to invest concentrated, strategic resources and time in the schools, students, and families within that circle so that the promise that this community and its children hold can be fully realized.

We are communicating this information to all Boston Public Schools staff, because the work of propelling our students to proficiency does not fall solely on these fourteen schools, but rather on every school and central office in the district. Though our preliminary focus for the strongest interventions rests on a small group of schools, we will hold every school and central department accountable for student progress using a set of measures that are transparent and reflect progress toward our goals. Some may dismiss these efforts by the district to change, but let’s be clear - we will either demonstrate that we have the capacity to self correct, or incur the consequences of families making other choices and others managing our schools and teaching our students.

We believe there are no limits to what our students can achieve and attain, because we see their accomplishments, as well as yours, on a daily basis, throughout our district. It is truly inspiring to know that our classrooms were filled throughout the summer with teachers working with students in Grades preK-12, and that despite the many school changes and moves, students were welcomed and greeted on day one. We know the work is challenging. However, it is a privilege to watch our staff educate and support students with disabilities at the Carter School or the Mary Lyon, or see the growth and emerging proficiency of non-English speakers at the O’Donnell and Tech Boston, or cheer as unlikely student debaters at Charlestown High and Urban Science Academy earn state recognition. We are making progress with students on the autism spectrum at the Mozart, Warren Prescott, and the Lee Schools, and we are also witnessing more students taking Algebra 1 in Grade 8, and more Black and Latino students taking Advanced Placement courses. We proudly salute the EdVestors School on the Move, Boston Community Leadership Academy, and applaud the progress this year at the Edwards and the Eliot. We know that despite their incomes, disabilities, race, or language, our students can and are achieving.

We cannot claim victory today. But we have established specific targets and together we will achieve them and hold ourselves accountable for reaching them. We will accept no excuses on our path toward equity and excellence for all.

Thank you for educating and serving the children and families of Boston.

Sincerely,



Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent