

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



July 22, 2009

Dear Boston Public Schools staff:

Summer is finally underway, and we do hope that you are finding time to reflect, refresh and rejuvenate! Some staff are involved in school moves and transitions, and others are taking courses to help improve student performance. We especially want to thank the educators and support staff who are working throughout the summer to provide extended learning, arts and recreational opportunities for students.

With your help, we are preparing for an excellent start to a new school year. Guided by the Acceleration Agenda, we are well positioned to make significant progress in closing achievement gaps and ensuring the success of every student. In the coming year, we must redouble our efforts to support and challenge all students, particularly students with disabilities and English language learners. Several recent studies and reports provide us with valuable findings and recommendations to strengthen our instructional programs for students with different learning needs, and we look forward to launching promising reforms in these areas in the months ahead.

We also are writing to keep you up to date on two important and timely issues: the district-wide **elementary literacy initiative** and the **in-district charter school** legislation. First, we acknowledge and thank the more than 150 staff who participated in a review of literacy materials and assisted the academic team in selecting *Scott Foresman Reading Street* from Pearson for students in kindergarten through grade 5. These materials reflect the recommendations offered by the National Reading Panel, the National Literacy Panel, and the current research that addresses early writing and oral language development. The Department of Literacy and Pearson will offer both central and site-based professional development during the coming school year to support this initiative. The new materials and the accompanying professional development will allow us to create a consistent literacy framework, align our standards, and give teachers the tools they need to meet the aggressive target in our Acceleration Agenda of having all third graders passing the Reading MCAS and 85 percent of them reaching proficiency by 2012.

We also believe that having a single elementary literacy program will help us address issues of student mobility, so that students who move from one school to another will not experience a change in curriculum. We recognize that while our Pilot and Discovery schools have curriculum flexibility, we hope that all elementary teachers will benefit from the professional development offered on multiple dates and different locations throughout the city. We are using some of our American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA, or stimulus) funds to move our K-5 literacy work forward. In the future, we also expect to develop additional ways to accelerate literacy instruction in our middle and high schools. You can learn more about the new elementary literacy program at www.bostonpublicschools.org/literacy.

Yesterday, we were proud to join Mayor Thomas M. Menino, School Committee members, principals, teachers, parents, business leaders and community partners to testify in support of the Mayor's in-district charter school legislation. At a hearing of the legislature's Education Committee, we described the profound opportunity before us to help transform some of Boston's most persistently low-performing schools. Mayor Menino's bill, filed by Rep. Marie St. Fleur, would authorize School Committees to create in-district charter schools. We believe we have the talent and opportunity to make dramatic improvements – and develop our own solutions – before further State intervention is necessary. These schools would remain part of the Boston Public Schools, but they would be granted significant autonomy to 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, these 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 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. Too often, they are crippled by the *status quo*, unable to make dramatic improvements on behalf of kids.

These schools – like every school – will succeed only if we can assemble a top-notch team of teachers and administrators who are willing to create a school culture where the needs of children and families come first. The legislation we support is designed to create the conditions for outstanding teaching and learning to take place in every classroom, led by talented educators committed to the success of every child.

Beginning next month, we look forward to a series of activities to welcome new and returning families and staff to a productive school year. In particular, we invite you to attend the 2nd annual **Back-to-School Jamboree** at City Hall Plaza, on Saturday, September 5, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. This free event – featuring activities, resources, performances, prizes and more – is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the start of a new school year. We look forward to welcoming all teachers and staff back to school on Tuesday, September 8, to begin preparing classrooms for another successful school opening. For more information about the start of the school year, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/welcome.

Thank you again for your tireless commitment to the children and families of the Boston Public Schools. Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Sincerely,



Rev. Gregory G. Groover, Sr.
Chair, Boston School Committee



Dr. Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent