

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

June 29, 2010

Dear Boston Public Schools Community,

As our students head home for a well-deserved summer break, I want to publicly commend our school teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, headmasters and other support staff for some truly remarkable accomplishments. Many other districts across the country are using the ongoing budget crisis to make excuses, but we are making history. Our classrooms are stronger than ever and our students are exceeding past performance. Here are just a few examples:

-Our graduation rate rose to its highest level ever.

-Our drop-out rate fell to its lowest level in more than two decades. This tells us that students are becoming more invested in their own educations. We can credit our strong teachers for keeping our children focused on the future.

-This year the professionals in our new **Reengagement Center** assisted more than 500 teenagers who had left the classroom in their return to school.

-In May, the **National Assessment of Educational Progress** praised **Boston's students** for improving much faster than the national average in reading and mathematics. In fact, average scores in grades four and eight have increased every year since we started participating in the NAEP study in 2003.

-Forty of our schools are receiving more resources to share enthusiasm for **arts, music, theater and dance** with students. We are excited to announce that BPS will receive \$800,000 in new grant money through our arts expansion partner, EdVestors, in the upcoming school year.

-Hundreds of teachers and principals have volunteered to join our efforts inside the **Circle of Promise** and our **Turnaround Schools**. New legislation has given us the ability to have increased flexibility at the 12 Turnaround Schools, allowing us to extend the classroom day and give teachers more time to learn, collaborate and plan together.

The Boston School Committee has adopted a shared set of goals, called the "Acceleration Agenda." You can find a copy at <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/agenda>. This is our roadmap for rapid, meaningful increases in academic achievement at all of our schools. The Agenda also calls for developing stronger partnerships with our parents and the broader community.

It's also important to recognize that as hard as our principals, teachers and staff work, our students spend most of their lives outside the classroom. This month I was thrilled to join Mayor Thomas M. Menino at an event launching the "Opportunity Agenda," a groundbreaking effort to coordinate the city's many charities and non-

profit foundations around the needs of the city's children. Their initial work begins with programs to help students find activities and learning opportunities during the summer break.

As we begin the summer recess, I want to share our vision for the exciting plans we have for the 2010-2011 school year and beyond:

-Mayor's Youth Zone: If you know a student who is still looking for a productive, quality summer activity, please let them know that the Mayor's Youth Zone hotline at (617) 635-KIDS is here to help.

-School Climate Surveys: You may have filled out one of these surveys in the spring, which went to school staff, students and parents. This summer we are collecting the results and will share the school-by-school results with you in the fall. These surveys are an important part of our ongoing effort to improve outreach. While these surveys are not meant as an evaluation, the results will give us all a better sense of how people perceive the teaching, learning, leadership and overall atmosphere at each of our schools.

-District Redesign and Reinvestment: We have extra space and seats in many of our buildings, so we have an opportunity to move some programs into schools that are a better fit. This process is called "Redesign and Reinvest." We will identify which programs are working for students and try to expand them, while identifying ways to improve other programs through mergers. A few programs might also close, but some of their resources would be reinvested elsewhere to improve opportunities across the city. This effort is similar to the Pathways to Excellence project. Please visit <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/redesign> to give us your thoughts on how to reshape our district services to give parents more choices, while upholding our promise to keep strong schools in every neighborhood. We will develop specific ideas in July and August, and host a round of open community meetings in September. BPS will present a plan to the School Committee in late October. Any changes would be implemented in the fall of 2011.

-Teachers' Contract: As you know, the three-year contract between BPS and the Boston Teachers Union expires at the end of August, and the process of negotiating a new one is underway. Although the Boston Public Schools anticipates more than a \$50 million budget gap next year, we are not backing away from our promises to our students and their families. This is why we are asking the Union to allow us greater flexibilities in staffing and time. Adding more classroom time and giving our teachers more time to prepare lessons and collaborate with each other are the best ways to ensure student success. Another goal concerns the evaluation process. The Union and BPS must work together to develop a meaningful tool that both principals and teachers will view as providing helpful feedback that advances their skills and careers.

Together, our schools and staff continue to turn the Boston Public Schools into a national model for education reform. Our students outperform their peers in big cities across the country because our teachers, paraprofessionals and other staff throughout the district are a shining example of what a team of dedicated, inspirational professionals can accomplish. Other cities are looking to us for leadership, and our focus is on the more than 56,000 children who look to us for life-changing lessons every single day. I am so proud of what we have accomplished this year, and I hope you have a wonderful, enjoyable, sunny summer. See you in the fall!

Gratefully,

Dr. Carol R. Johnson

Superintendent