



**A Plan to Close the Achievement Gap in  
the Boston Public Schools**

**July 29, 2013**

## Introduction

I am a son of Boston. I am a proud graduate of the Boston Public Schools, as are all of my four siblings. I am the child, husband, and brother of Boston Public School teachers, and all of my nieces and nephews of school age attend the Boston Public Schools. Simply put, ensuring that every single one of our children in Boston receives a high quality education is a deeply personal issue to me.

Boston has made tremendous progress in addressing the achievement gap in our city's schools, but the fact remains that students of color, low-income students, and English language learners achieve success at lower rates than their peers. In the past few years, Mayor Menino and Governor Patrick have spearheaded a number of initiatives aimed at giving students, parents, and educators the tools and resources to elevate the achievement of traditionally underserved groups in Boston's schools. It is vital to realize that the roots of the achievement gap do not begin and end with the school day; outside of school, students face myriad challenges, from hunger to violence to drugs and alcohol. The fact that 75% of the students in the BPS system are considered low-income should be deeply troubling to all of us.

While we must take a long, hard look at our schools, we must also address the challenges of poverty that face so many of Boston's students on a daily basis. Only then can we begin to provide students the safe, healthy environment that will enable them to learn. We must continue working to ensure that every student has access to instruction that is engaging, relevant, and culturally sensitive; we must give every child in Boston the opportunity to enroll in an early education program; we must give teachers the personnel and material resources to do their jobs; we must ensure that outside of school, every student has the basic necessities that allow them to achieve academic success; finally, we must work with all stakeholders to measure student and staff progress towards the goal of eliminating the achievement gap.

Over the past few years, city and state government officials, school leaders, and community members have focused tremendous energy on closing the achievement gap. Governor Patrick has called for nearly unprecedented new investment in education throughout the Commonwealth; Mayor Menino has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes for Boston's students; the BPS system has developed and begun implementing a detailed strategy for addressing the gap; community businesses and non-profits have been ready partners in the effort to raise the level of achievement among our city's youth. The concerted efforts of these diverse groups have not been in vain; achievement among nearly every student group has increased over the past five years. In fact, in 2012, the overall graduation rate for BPS students reached its highest level ever.<sup>1</sup> Despite all of this progress, however, disparities

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<sup>1</sup> ["Graduation rate in Boston Public Schools rises to all-time high,"](#) Boston Public Schools, 2/15/2012

<sup>2</sup> ["Achievement Gap,"](#) Citizens for Public Schools

among student groups within the BPS system persist. It will be incumbent upon the next Mayor of Boston to maintain and expand on the momentum that has been created and give every student in Boston the best possible chance to succeed.

## **The Current Landscape**

It is essential to understand that, while MCAS scores and graduation rates are useful tools for measuring student achievement (and are, in fact, used as the basic measures in this analysis), they are far from the only tools. If we are serious about closing the achievement gap, we must consider a broad range of achievement indicators, including data on attendance, suspension and expulsion rates, retention rates, college acceptance and college persistence.<sup>2</sup> Only by taking such a holistic view of student achievement will it be possible to fully understand the challenges facing our students and schools, and to meaningfully measure our progress towards closing the achievement gap.

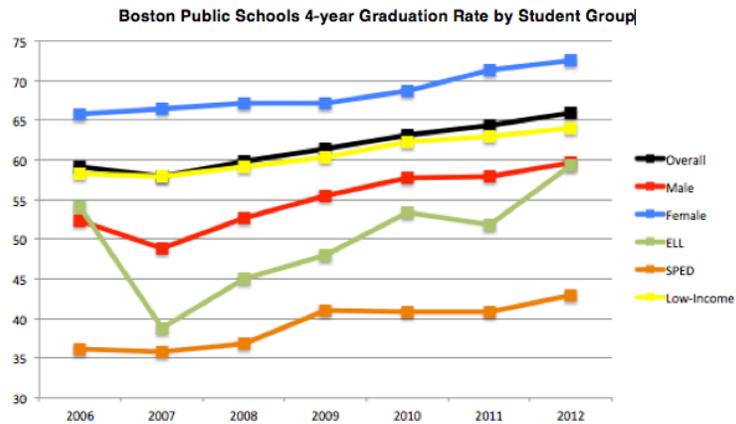
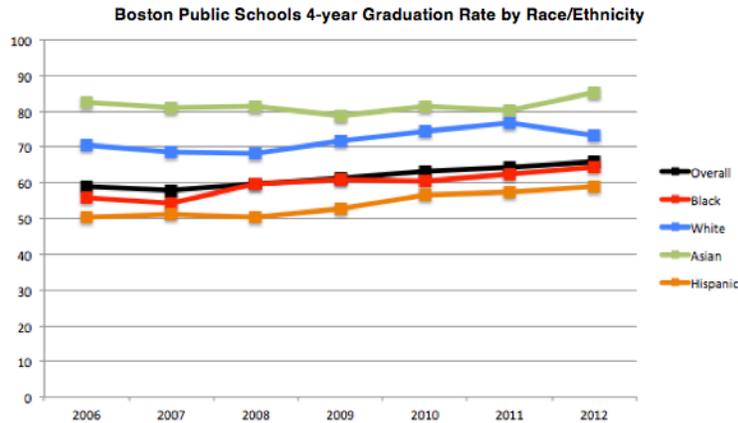
In 2012-13, there were more than 57,000 students enrolled at the 127 schools within the BPS system; another 6,600 students were enrolled at public charter schools in Boston. Among the 57,000 students enrolled in Boston public schools, 87% were students of color; that 87% was comprised of 40% Hispanic students, 36% Black students, 9% Asian students, and 2% student who identified as multiracial. 75% of all students in the BPS system in 2012-13 were eligible to receive free or reduced price meals in school, meaning they were considered low-income. Nearly half of all BPS students spoke a language other than English as their first language, and 30% of all students were considered limited English proficient (LEP) or English language learners (ELL). Lastly, more than 11,000 BPS students were enrolled in special education programs during the 2012-13 school year.<sup>3</sup>

Using graduation rates and performance on MCAS exams as benchmarks, certain trends in student achievement become immediately apparent: although graduation rates among each major racial group have increased over the past seven years, the rate of graduation among Black and Hispanic students still lags far behind that of their White and Asian peers; the graduation rate for students with special needs, low-income students, and English language learners remains below the overall graduation rate for BPS students. The graphs below illustrate graduation rates for the 2012 cohort (students who entered high school in 2008):

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<sup>2</sup> ["Achievement Gap,"](#) Citizens for Public Schools

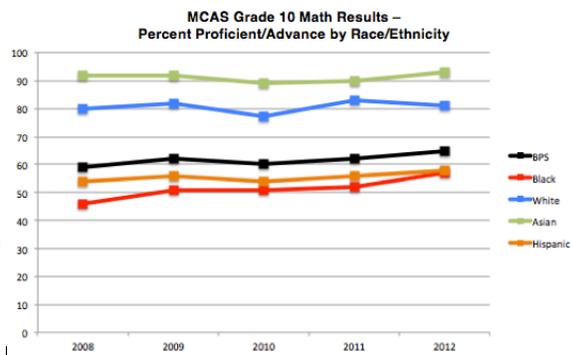
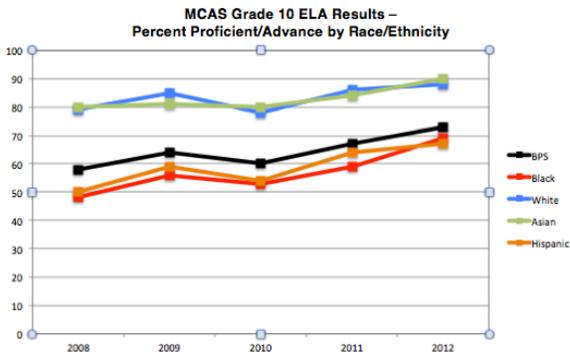
<sup>3</sup> ["BPS at a Glance 2012 – 2013,"](#) Boston Public Schools Communications Office, April 2013



*Note: the scale on the graph above is limited to more clearly show the discrepancies between different student groups. Source: “[Revised Final Four-year High School Graduation Rate: 2012 Cohort](#),” Boston Public Schools*

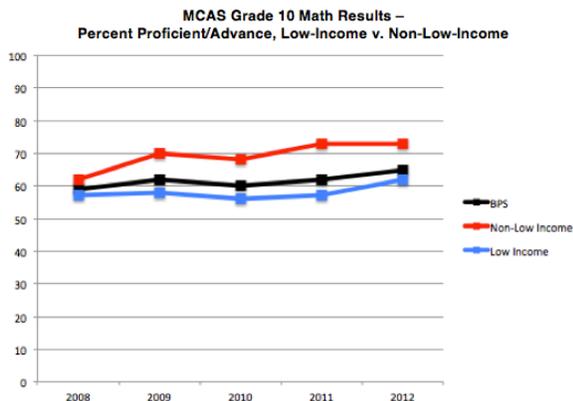
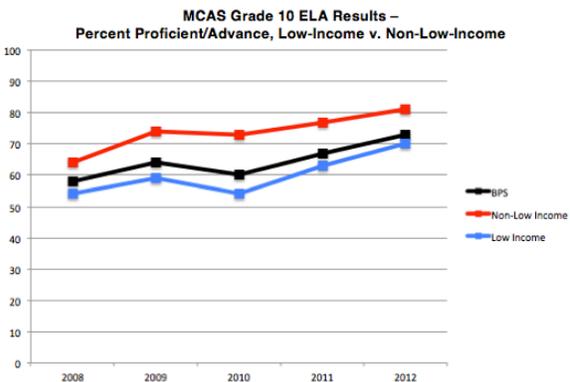
Looking at MCAS achievement in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, which is used to determine eligibility for high school graduation,<sup>4</sup> the rate of Black and Hispanic students scoring Proficient/Advanced is more than 20 percent below that of their White and Asian counterparts, in both math and English Language Arts (ELA). Despite the persistence of achievement gaps with White and Asian students, the rate of achievement among Black and Hispanic students in English language arts has gone up dramatically over the past five years; the rate of Black students scoring Proficient/Advanced has increased 21% since 2008, the rate of Hispanic student scoring Proficient/Advanced has increased 17%. In math, the rate of achievement among Black students has gone up 11% since 2008; the success among Hispanic students in math less so, having increased only four percent since 2008.

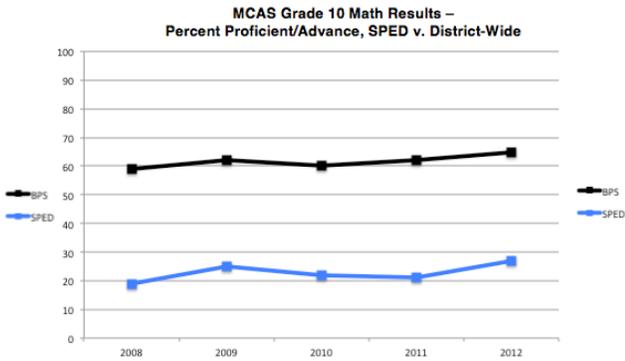
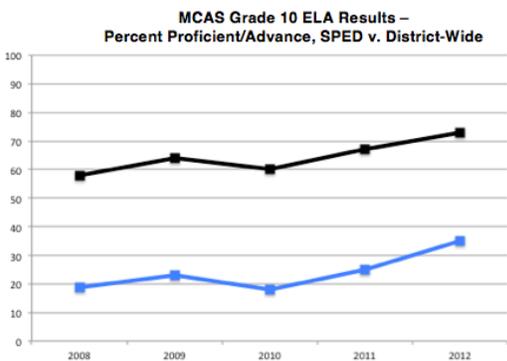
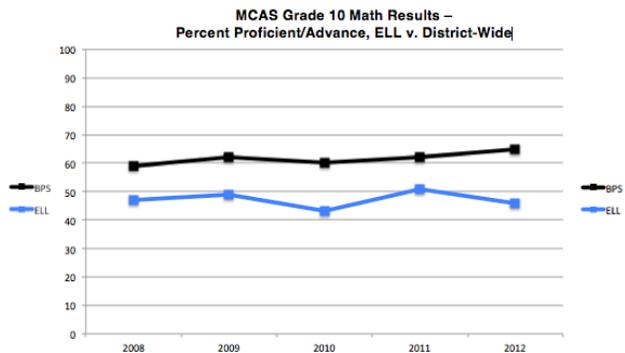
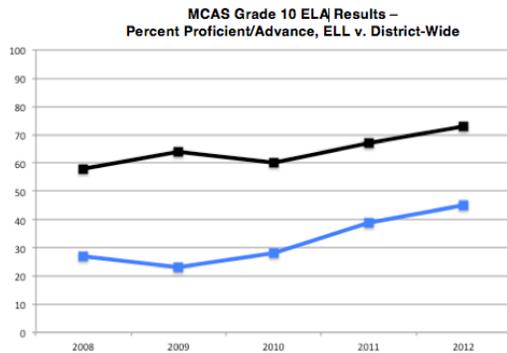
<sup>4</sup> “[Charter Schools and the Road to College Readiness](#),” School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative at M.I.T (produced for The Boston Foundation and NewSchools Venture Fund), May 2013



Source: “[MCAS Spring 2012 results](#),” Boston Public Schools

Among other student groups, achievement on 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS is similarly disparate. In general, student performance has increased across subgroups and subjects over the past five years; this wide-ranging increase in achievement is cause for optimism, however, large gulfs in achievement still exist among different groups within the BPS system. Low-income students, who comprise three quarters of the total enrollment in BPS, reach the Proficient/Advanced standard at far lower rates than their non-low-income classmates; English language learners fall nearly 30 percentage points behind the overall district in ELA and nearly 20 points in math; lastly, in 2012, students with special needs reached the Proficient/Advanced level at a rate below half that of the overall district, in both ELA and math. The charts below illustrate the discrepancies among various student groups:





Source(s): “[Results of Spring 2012](#),” Boston Public Schools Office of Data and Accountability, April 2013; “[2012 MCAS Report](#),” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 9/27/2012

## Moving Forward: 6 Point Action Plan

There are a number of steps the next Mayor can take to build on Boston’s momentum and finish the job of closing the achievement gap. In our public schools, we can increase access to early childhood education, give our schools more time to teach and our students more time to learn, give teachers more resources, and implement curricula that is both culturally competent and responsive to the demands placed on students when they enter the workforce.

The charter schools that currently operate in Boston continue to contribute to our system as a whole, but now is not the time to raise the cap on charter schools. While we cannot be lulled into a “one-size-fits-all” approach to education, we ought to focus our resources and efforts on the BPS system, which educates the vast majority of Boston’s young people. With all that in mind, it is important to have a clear, detailed vision of how we can change Boston’s school system for the better. Below are several policy proposals that will move us down the road to closing the achievement gap once and for all.

### 1) *Increase Access to Early Childhood Education*

In our continuing efforts to close the achievement gap, we must start with our youngest students. We know that until third grade, all students are learning to read; after third grade, students are reading to learn. It is absolutely clear that reading proficiency in third grade is a powerful component and indicator of future academic achievement. We must give every student in Boston a firm foundation from which to reach for future success, and this starts with providing every student with access to high-quality early education.

Public K1 (Pre-Kindergarten) classes are open to any 4-year-old in Boston, but as of April 2012, only 28-35% of the eligible children in Boston were enrolled.<sup>5</sup> A study of 2011 3<sup>rd</sup> grade MCAS results among students in BPS schools showed that students who attended K1 scored Advanced/Proficient at a rate nearly 10% higher than students who did not attend K1. Boston has already begun to make strides in expanding access to early education; between 2005 and 2011, the number of Boston students enrolled in K1 rose from 750 to 2,300.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the BPS has worked with private organizations and non-profits to increase the number of K1 classrooms.

There are a number of steps the next mayor can take to fulfill the promise of providing universal, public early education:

- Ensure adequate funding for early education programs at both the city and state level. In his FY 2014 budget proposal, Governor Patrick called for \$131 million in new investment in the early education and care system;<sup>7</sup> Mayor Menino proposed a budget that paved the way for more than 700 new seats in early education classrooms.<sup>8</sup> We must continue to make meaningful investment in our early education system, to ensure that every student has access that wants it and that teachers are given the resources to provide a consistent, high-quality level of instruction.
- Continue to nurture partnerships with community organizations and businesses. Non-profit organizations and businesses in communities throughout Boston are essential partners in ensuring the growth and success of early education. We need more programs like Boston Children Thrive and Smart from the Start's Community Unity Initiative<sup>9</sup> that provide young children with learning materials and give parents and caregivers the resources and knowledge to be active partners in their children's early development.
- Give teachers the resources and training to consistently provide the highest quality early education to all students. Children in Boston receive

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<sup>5</sup> ["Impacts of BPS K1 on Children's Early Numeracy, Language, Literacy, Executive Functioning, and Emotional Development,"](#) Harvard Graduate School of Education, 4/11/2012

<sup>6</sup> ["Early Childhood Update,"](#) Boston Public Schools, 4/11/2012

<sup>7</sup> ["Patrick-Murray Administration files fiscal year 2014 budget,"](#) Office of Governor Deval Patrick (press release), 1/23/2013

<sup>8</sup> ["Innovations in Education – FY 2014 Recommended Budget,"](#) Office of Mayor Menino

<sup>9</sup> "Boston's progress towards universal school readiness: year two report," Thrive in Five, April 2011

early education in a number of settings: family childcare, private/community based centers, Head Start/Early Head Start, and school-based early education. We must give teachers and caregivers access to professional development and adequate funding to reach for or maintain accreditation. Accreditation is the “gold standard of quality,” according to Boston’s “Thrive in Five” initiative; promoting accreditation ensures that all of our children are receiving the highest quality early education possible to set them on the path to academic success.<sup>10</sup>

## **2) Increase Opportunities for Extended Learning Time (ELT)**

The school day for elementary, middle, and high school students in Boston is, on average, around six and a half hours; if we are serious about closing the achievement gap, this is not enough. Studies in Massachusetts have shown that schools that provide students with opportunities for extended learning time have dramatically improved performance in a number of areas, including MCAS scores, breadth of opportunities for students, and collaboration and professional development among teachers.

In 2005, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the non-profit Massachusetts 2020 launched the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative. In its first year, 10 schools signed on, including the Edward and Timilty Middle Schools and Umana Middle School Academy in Boston. In 2010, Massachusetts 2020 reported that in those original schools, MCAS performance across all grades increased by 8.1% in ELT, nearly 20% in math, and more than 9% in science. In addition, those schools reported broadening education opportunities for students, including more art and music instruction, and teachers reported higher satisfaction with the amount of time available for collaboration and professional development.<sup>11</sup>

In order to build on and expand the success of extended learning time initiatives, the next mayor must:

- Work with all stakeholders to ensure buy-in to the ELT model. In May, Amrita Sahni, Director of Instruction at the Edwards Middle School (one of the original schools to participate in the ELT initiative) wrote an article reflecting on Edwards’ experience implementing ELT; she wrote that one of the keys was forming focus groups of administrators, teachers, staff, and other community partners to research and discuss the ELT framework.<sup>12</sup> If we hope to expand the ELT model throughout the BPS system, the Mayor must work with the Boston Teacher’s Union and school administrators to make sure that all stakeholders, including parents,

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<sup>10</sup> Thrive in Five Boston [website](#)

<sup>11</sup> “[Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative 2010-2011 Update](#),” Massachusetts 2020

<sup>12</sup> “[Implementing Expanding Learning Time: Six Factors for Success](#),” Edutopia, 5/21/2013

students, and community leaders, are actively engaged in the implementation process.

- Set procedures and monitor the collection of data to ensure that ELT is used effectively. One of the best elements of ELT is that it gives schools and teachers the flexibility to tailor instruction to the needs of the student body or even individual students. The Mayor must work with school administrators and teachers to establish a framework for collecting and analyzing data on learning and achievement that will be used as a guide on how best to utilize ELT.
- Promote the use of ELT for arts and music education. Numerous studies have shown that students who have access to regular arts and music classes perform better in a wide range of academic and social pursuits; students with more arts education score better on the SATs, they are more likely to be involved in community service, and they report less boredom in school.<sup>13</sup> BPS has made great strides in expanding arts education, but we can do more. By incorporating extra time into the school day, the Mayor and BPS officials can ensure that every student in Boston has access to regular instruction in the arts and music. Also, by giving schools and teachers more time with their students, we can encourage a wider range of offerings within the arts and music; the Edwards Middle school, one of the schools involved in the ELT initiative, offers electives including musical theater, fine art, concert band, and step dancing.<sup>14</sup>
- Consult students and recruit community partners to offer a diverse and engaging curriculum that includes physical education and sports. The effectiveness of ELT is lost if students remain disinterested in what they are learning; in addition to instruction in core areas such as math and science, successful ELT schools like the Edwards use the added flexibility to incorporate elective courses ranging from basketball and track to concert band and cooking.<sup>15</sup> The Mayor and school officials must work to elicit student input on elective courses and then pursue partnerships with community members, non-profits, and businesses to make those courses a reality.
- Encourage schools to use ELT as a time to connect students with adults and businesses in their community, as well as offer additional classroom instruction. Citizen Schools, a national organization based in Boston, has established a model for ELT that emphasizes apprenticeships and exposure to team building and the business world, along with academic support.<sup>16</sup> In addition to working with community members and businesses to create innovative coursework (discussed above), the Mayor must also

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<sup>13</sup> "Critical Evidence: how the arts benefit student achievement," National Assembly of State Art Agencies, 2006

<sup>14</sup> "[Implementing Expanding Learning Time: Six Factors for Success](#)," Edutopia, 5/21/2013

<sup>15</sup> "[Implementing Expanding Learning Time: Six Factors for Success](#)," Edutopia, 5/21/2013

<sup>16</sup> "Closing the opportunity gap," Citizen Schools [website](#)

work to develop opportunities for students to gain real world experience in fields that interest them.

### **3) Expand access to STEM education**

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (collectively known as STEM) is the basis of some of the fastest growing industries in Boston and throughout the Commonwealth, including healthcare and life sciences. It is essential to the success of our young people and the continued health of our economy that we prepare students for careers in these burgeoning fields. Over the past few years, Massachusetts' officials have announced a number of initiatives to address existing disparities in STEM fields and raise interest and achievement among all students. The next Mayor must make it a priority to get students, particularly students of color, interested in STEM subjects and provide them with high quality instruction that will set them on the road to success.

In 2011, the New England Economic Partnership projected that the health and education "supersector," which relies heavily on workers with STEM skills, will add nearly 20,000 jobs by 2016.<sup>17</sup> In the Commonwealth as a whole, employment in biotechnology and life sciences has grown by more than 125% since 2001; much of that expansion has taken place in the Boston metro area.<sup>18</sup> Despite the exploding importance of STEM skills, sizeable achievement gaps remain among Boston students in math and science. Nationally, Hispanic and black workers represent only 2% and 3% of the STEM workforce, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

In order to address achievement disparities in STEM fields and prepare students for successful careers in Boston's growing industries, the next Mayor should:

- Expand upon industry partnerships and provide hands-on learning experiences. A major challenge in increasing STEM achievement, particularly among underrepresented groups like minorities and women, is getting students interested in fields that employ STEM skills. In the past few years, Massachusetts has launched several initiatives to get students actively involved, including the DIGITS project, which pairs STEM professionals with sixth grade classes throughout the state, and WPI's Project Lead the Way, which develops a hands-on STEM curriculum for students in grades 6-12.<sup>20</sup> With the wealth of STEM companies in and around Boston, the next Mayor should work to foster partnerships that enable students to interact with STEM professionals and learn through real-world experiences.
- Establish a framework for expanding and improving STEM instruction through the BPS system. An essential step in closing the achievement gap

<sup>17</sup> "2013 Economic Report," Boston Redevelopment Authority, January 2013

<sup>18</sup> "Life Sciences Innovation...", Boston Foundation, 2013

<sup>19</sup> "Education supports racial and ethnic equality in STEM," US Department of Commerce (report), September 2011

<sup>20</sup> "[Mass. Backs six STEM programs](#)," Boston Business Journal, 8/18/2011

in STEM subjects is ensuring that students in schools across Boston have access to consistently high-quality STEM instruction. The next Mayor can help accomplish this goal by working with school leaders to establish a framework that identifies community-based resources, best practices among schools, tracks students' performance, and serves as a guide for schools as they implement new STEM programs.

- Recruit and train teachers who will comprise a talented educational workforce responsible for teaching our young people. In a complex, rapidly evolving field like STEM, it is important that teachers receive the training and support that enables them to keep Boston's students on the cutting edge. The next Mayor must work with State and local officials to establish a set of standards for STEM instructors and provide training and support, with the eventual goal of aligning teacher training with the national Common Core Standards in STEM. In addition, the Mayor and school officials should work to recruit teachers with backgrounds in STEM education or industries.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4) Improve vocational-technical education offerings**

Vocational-technical education offers students the unique opportunity to receive a traditional academic education while also gaining valuable hands-on experience in a variety of vocations, from carpentry to television broadcasting. Boston is home to only a single vocational school, Madison Park Technical-Vocational High School. Making Madison Park a model for vocational education and giving Boston's students a viable alternative to traditional public school that will give them the knowledge and skills to achieve success academically and in the workforce must be a priority for the next Mayor.

While enrollment demand at vocational-technical high schools across the Commonwealth has exploded over the past few years,<sup>22</sup> Madison Park remains mired in a "downward spiral" of high absenteeism, lagging MCAS scores, and low graduation rates. During the 2012-13 school year, more than 1200 students were enrolled at Madison Park; Black and Hispanic students accounted for more than 90% of overall enrollment. Despite the focus and efforts of city and school officials and educators in recent years, the school continues to lag far behind other schools in the BPS system and its counterparts across the state; at Madison Park, "less than one-third of students score proficient or advanced on the MCAS exam; more than 40% of entering freshman fail to graduate in four years; and the average student is absent for more than a month each school year."<sup>23</sup> In order to transform Madison Park into the innovative, cutting-edge center of learning that it can be, the next Mayor must:

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<sup>21</sup> "A Foundation for the Future...", Governor's STEM Advisory Council (report), 9/28/2010

<sup>22</sup> "Bay State voke-tech schools are an education success story," T&G, 6/13/2008

<sup>23</sup> "[Madison Park Technical Vocational High School](#)," BPS website

- Pursue more partnerships with private industry and institutions of higher education. Even more so than for traditional public schools, forming partnerships with industries and higher education in the community is essential to the mission of vocation-technical schools. Such partnerships provide students with hands-on experiences while in school and give them a defined path into the workforce after graduation. The next Mayor must pursue more partnerships like the recently announced RoxMAPP program, which will give students at Madison Park the opportunity to enroll directly in Roxbury Community College after graduation and will do more to connect students with local employers and the specific training to become successful members of the workforce.
- Establish high expectations for students and give them the long-term support to reach their goals. One of the most successful vocational schools in the Commonwealth is Worcester Technical High School, which has a graduation rate of more than 85% and a dropout rate below 5%; WTHS' success is due, at least in part, to increasing academic rigor, including honors classes and AP offerings, and expanding technical area offerings; most importantly, however, every student is required to maintain a career plan that combines course selection, career pathways, and guidance from their counselors, technical instructors, other school officials. This innovative approach has led to consistently higher student achievement, and the next Mayor must strive to replicate this kind of innovative collaboration at Madison Park.<sup>24</sup>
- Give Madison Park a greater measure of autonomy. Many of the state's most successful vocational high schools, including Worcester Technical, have some modicum of autonomy from the broader school district regarding decisions on budget, curriculum, and operations. Innovations pursued by such autonomous schools include extending the school year and creating stronger teacher linkages across academics and technical areas. "The needs and responsibilities of vocational-technical students are unique. It only makes sense for schools to have the freedom to set policies and procedures customized to fit those students," according to David Ferreira, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators.<sup>25</sup> It is incumbent on the next Mayor to give teachers and administrators at Madison Park the freedom to make decisions that give students the best chance to succeed.

### **5) Implement curriculum and practices that are relevant and responsive to underserved groups**

In a school system as diverse as Boston's, where more than 85% of students come from communities of color, it is crucial that students are exposed to

<sup>24</sup> "[Laying the foundation for future success](#)," NASSP (article), May 2011

<sup>25</sup> "Madison Park needs autonomy to succeed," Boston Globe (op-ed), 7/11/2013

curriculum that is relevant to their unique background and interests. The BPS understands the importance of culturally sensitive instruction; in August they will hold a weeklong summer institute for K-12 teachers titled “*Cultural Proficiency for Today’s Diverse Schools: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.” Keeping students engaged and interested in what they are learning will help close achievement gaps across racial and other unique student groups.

In a video produced by the National Education Association, Sharon Nelson-Barber, Director of the Center for Culture and Language at the education non-profit WestEd, said, “the [achievement] gap has to do with the misunderstanding of different ways of looking at the world, of different explanations, of different ways of conceiving content and the more we educate and inform our teachers, our leaders, ... then we’ll have the opportunity to ensure that the gaps will be closed.”<sup>26</sup> In order to spearhead the effort to make Boston’s schools and teachers more culturally competent, the next Mayor must:

- Make college preparation, financial literacy, and civics courses a requirement of our curriculum citywide. These three areas are central to ensuring the readiness of our children for their futures after high school, and will provide vital skills to prepare them for what’s next, whether it is college or employment.
- Review district curricula to ensure they reflect the characteristics of the student body. The next Mayor should work with school administrators, teachers, and community members to develop lesson plans and educational opportunities that reflect the socio-economic conditions of the student population and are culturally relevant. In addition, instruction should be tailored to individuals schools and classes based on “students’ preferred learning styles, communication and behavioral styles, linguistic characteristics and achievement levels.”<sup>27</sup>
- Ensure that cultural competence is an ongoing part of professional development for teachers. The goal of increasing cultural competence in order to shrink the achievement gap should be incorporated into the Dimensions of Effective Teaching, which guide the professional development of BPS teachers, according to a BPS policy statement on the achievement gap.<sup>28</sup> The next Mayor must work to ensure that teachers have the training and institutional support to employ multiple pedagogical strategies in reaching out to a diverse student body.
- Work to guarantee that students from the most challenged populations have the basic resources (food, shelter, healthcare) that give them a chance to succeed in school. Students in the Boston schools come from a

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<sup>26</sup> “[Why cultural competence](#),” National Education Association

<sup>27</sup> “[Eliminating the achievement gap](#),” Boston Public Schools (policy statement)

<sup>28</sup> “[Eliminating the achievement gap](#),” Boston Public Schools (policy statement)

wide range of socio-economic backgrounds; success in school is predicated on the assumption that students have access to safe housing, nutritious food, and adequate healthcare. It falls on the Mayor, school administrators, and teachers to identify students from different backgrounds who may be facing insurmountable challenges outside of school. We see an example of this in Mayor Menino's Circle of Promise Initiative, which seeks to take a holistic approach to improve academic achievement in some of Boston's poorest communities. The Mayor must strive to ensure that parents, community members, and school officials have the tools to give students a solid base from which they can succeed.

- Guarantee that students have access to mental healthcare in schools. A student's mental health and wellbeing are essential to their prospects for academic success. According to a BPS publication from September 2012, BPS students, both disabled and not, currently have access to a wide range of mental health services.<sup>29</sup> We must work to ensure that students in every BPS school, especially students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, have continued, easy access to mental health care; in addition to the physical healthcare provided by school nurses.

#### **6) *Ensure that teachers have the human and material resources to do the best job possible***

In an era of increasing class sizes and budget constraints, we must ensure that teachers have the personnel and material resources to provide the highest quality instruction possible.

In FY 2012, as part of an effort to address a multi-million dollar budget gap created in part by rising healthcare costs and decreasing state aid, BPS administrator's proposed raising target minimum classes for 6-12 graders and making a series of other cuts across the school district.<sup>30</sup> These moves placed even more of a burden on the BPS' more than 6,000 teachers, aides, and support staff. In order to give schools and teachers the needed resources to meaningfully address the achievement gap, the next Mayor must:

- Pursue partnerships with local colleges and universities that increase the number of adult instructors in our schools. Boston Public Schools would benefit from partnering with local universities and other groups to increase the personnel resources available to our schools and students. We can see a successful example of this type of program in the partnership between the Boston Teachers Union School and Simmons College; through the program, education and social work student teachers and interns work alongside teachers at the school, volunteers from the

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<sup>29</sup> "Superintendent's Circular: SPE-14," BPS, 9/1/2012

<sup>30</sup> "[FY 2012 Budget](#)," Boston Public Schools

Graduate School of Library Science helped build the school's library, and faculty from the Department of Education have assisted with professional development efforts.<sup>31</sup> Forming these kinds of innovative partnerships will give schools and teachers the ability to provide students with the small group and one-on-one instruction that is proven to increase achievement.

- Fight for more funding for education. In his most recent budget proposal, Governor Patrick called for \$550 million in new, targeted investment in education, including increasing Chapter 70 funding to \$4.39 billion. If we want to give our teachers the resources they need and ensure that our students are nationally competitive, we must seriously consider this type of robust, long-term investment in our education system.
- Create an effective means for sharing best practices among schools. Efficiency is essential to using a stretched school budget as productively as possible. The Mayor must work with city and school officials to give administrators and teachers the opportunity to share best practices with their counterparts from other schools.

## Conclusion

The Boston Public Schools have come a long way in the past five years, but there is still a great deal of work to do. We cannot accept a status quo in which students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities achieve academic success at consistently lower rates than their peers. As we look forward, the next mayoral administration must make addressing the achievement gap an immediate priority. By embracing the policy proposals outlined above, we can continue to build on the momentum that has been created and make Boston a city where every student has the same opportunities and chances of success.

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<sup>31</sup> ["Simmons and the Boston Teachers Union lead...."](#) Simmons College website