

# *Transforming* the Boston Public Schools

*Executive Summary*

## A Roadmap for the New Superintendent



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# Citizen Commission on Academic Success for Boston Children

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# Preface

The Citizen Commission on Academic Success for Boston Children is grounded in the belief that in a democracy, citizens have a right and responsibility to critically examine societal institutions and try to change them for the better. We were not appointed by a governmental body or elected officials, as is usually the case with commissions. Our authority is derived from our collective deep experience in public education reform and our longstanding commitment to radical transformation of the Boston Public Schools (BPS). Four of our commissioners have carried out this work for more than four decades, while others have been tirelessly engaged in it for years.

Our coming together was fueled by our outrage over Boston's intractable achievement gaps from elementary through high school: many Black and Latino students achieve at lower levels than their white and Asian counterparts, English language learners at lower levels than native speakers, and students with disabilities at lower levels than their nondisabled peers.

While we are heartened by the progress Boston has made in raising academic achievement during Superintendent Thomas Payzant's tenure, we are

deeply troubled that the majority of Boston's students have not achieved proficiency in any of the subjects measured by the MCAS. A school and civic culture that celebrates the "needs improvement" result on the MCAS institutionalizes low expectations for student achievement. We are concerned that, without more rapid and transformational change, proficiency and advanced levels will continue to be attained by only a small percentage of BPS students. In a similar vein, it is absolutely unacceptable that up to 30% of students drop out during their high school years. By dropping out, a third of our young people, overwhelmingly Black, Latino and male, close themselves off from the possibility of achieving economic prosperity. The dropout rate is a crisis and demands an urgent and comprehensive response from school and city leaders.

Our Citizen Commission shined its spotlight on what is required to ensure excellent instruction and support services for students, because these are the keys to achieving academic success for all Boston children and young people. Years of educational research have confirmed that high quality principal leadership and parents who are actively engaged in the schooling of their

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children also contribute to academic success. Believing, like smart architects, that “form follows function,” we have not focused on central administration arrangements and organizational charts. School system leadership, however, must breathe life into a culture of change, place exceptional principals and competent teachers in schools, and support them with effective instructional models and resources. There must also be an accountability system that swiftly removes inadequate principals and teachers from the school system. We expect School Committee stewardship that shapes, promotes, and cherishes a school-by-school and a systemwide culture of high expectations of academic achievement for all, rigorous accountability, and transparency.

There is no greater challenge, and no greater promise, than for this school system to overcome deeply rooted issues of race and class and finally respect students and their parents as full educational partners in this endeavor.

Superintendent Payzant branded his administration’s work “Focus on Children.” Thus, we were constantly reminded that meeting the needs of children is at the core of the educational enterprise. For this legacy, we are grateful. Our commission has identified the improvements achieved during Dr. Payzant’s tenure, which provide us with a platform for the transformational change we seek.

Demanding academic success for all of Boston’s children, today we find ourselves far from our destination. What BPS needs now is a “focus on results.” We urge the new superintendent to devote the first six months primarily to devising a plan to eliminate the achievement gaps within five years, making them a sad relic of the past, and ensuring that many more of our young

people stay in school and successfully graduate. There is no higher calling for BPS leadership.

We caution against a single-minded focus on preparing children to pass MCAS tests to the exclusion of a vibrant, well-rounded education. We want for all of the children of the Boston Public Schools what all parents want for their own children: not only mastery of academic skills and knowledge, but also curious and inquiring minds, creative gifts, leadership potential and a commitment to serving their communities. MCAS tests cannot evaluate those attributes and assets. In short, teaching to state-mandated tests is unacceptable pedagogy.

Our Citizen Commission has produced a roadmap report that will guide the new superintendent and the School Committee in radically transforming the Boston Public Schools. We want this document to stimulate vigorous public conversations in Boston about the educational issues that really matter. An activated and engaged citizenry is indispensable to achieving the transformational changes that are urgently needed. The emergence of charter schools, pilot schools, home schooling, voucher schemes, and interdistrict transfer programs reveal that public schooling, as we have historically known it, is at a crossroads in the nation. Boston, as the intellectual capital of the nation, has a responsibility to lead public education to the correct destination. This is probably our last chance to save public schooling.

*Hubert E. Jones*  
*Citizen Commission Chair*

# Citizen Commission's Message to the Community

If we are going to achieve real change in our schools then we must begin to change our own behavior. We must recognize that the schools reflect the values and behavior that we exhibit in our communities and the way we relate to each other on the basis of race, class, sexual orientation, religion, gender, and disability.

*We must adopt a parental and community ideology that values all of the children as our own and demands for them the best education imaginable.*

We must understand that we hold in our heads, hands, and hearts our children's trust. We must adopt a parental and community ideology that values all of the children as our own and demands for them the best education imaginable.

To achieve the kind of results we seek, we must develop positive and substantive relationships between parents and the institutions in our city and communities. We must understand that the children's separate seating in school cafeterias reflects our own separate communities, our own separate seating in the lunchrooms of our working places. So we must be serious in our efforts and work to build the relationships that send our children the message that we are a village working in their interest.

We must as parents and as a community understand that it is our responsibility to protect our children physically and psychologically, to help them to understand their history and culture, to give them meaningful work and responsibilities, and to help them address their rage—and, in particular, the impact of trauma in their lives.

We must collaborate with our young people to find solutions to the issues and problems they are dealing with. They understand, and have the energy to grapple

with, the day-to-day problems that plague our schools. They should take a leadership role in school reform. At the same time, we must insist they address self-destructive behaviors and honor the legacy of the youth who in their name confronted danger and endured hardship to provide them with the opportunities they have today.

We must insist that resources, both monetary and human, are available to the children. We must all have high expectations for our children, we must believe that they can achieve intellectually, and we must recognize the genius in them. The youth must see us visibly banding together across racial, ethnic, class, and religious lines to make sure that the schools provide them with the best.

They must understand that we respect each other, and that we insist that they be respected

and that they respect each other and the adults who work with them.

Once we are clear on who we are, the dual questions of whose schools are these and in whose interest should they be operating must be answered with a resounding “ours, and in our children’s interest.” Without ownership and a sense of our own power, there cannot be any real change that will result in equity and excellence in the schools.

We must be willing to work together to challenge and hold accountable those responsible for public education, from the mayor and the incoming superintendent to the School Committee and staff, school by school and classroom by classroom. This means organizing in every school, with community support. In several instances, community organizations, churches, and elected officials will have to be challenged and pushed to get behind these efforts.

We must resolve to make every school a place where parents and community members regularly meet to discuss and support efforts to bring out the best in our children. It will be a struggle, but it must be waged if the schools are going to work for all of our children. We have no alternative if we want to honor our children’s trust.

# Executive Summary

After eleven and a half years with the “stars aligned”—a superintendent, School Committee, and mayor all working together to improve the Boston Public School system—it’s time to take stock. We want our schools to work for all students and to offer them the best education imaginable. How close are we to getting there, and where do we still need to go? These are the questions that *Transforming the Boston Public Schools: A Roadmap for the New Superintendent* attempts to answer.

The Citizen Commission on Academic Success for Boston Children was not appointed by policy makers or elected officials. It formed itself through the leadership of Hubie Jones, Mel King, Chuck Turner, and other community leaders. The Commission’s 17 members have all been involved for many years in improving the Boston Public School system. Many others, both inside and outside BPS, provided us with valuable information and insights. This spring, the Commission held a public hearing to listen to testimony from parents, young people, BPS employees, activists, and representatives of community-based organizations. What we heard affirmed our findings and informed the recommendations presented here.

Our aspirations for this report are high. We hope it will spark and help frame a public debate about the direction of BPS. We hope that the new superintendent and his or her leadership team will make use of its information and recommendations. And we hope, perhaps most of

all, that this report will catalyze people and organizations in Boston to work together to transform the school system.

Achieving proficiency on the MCAS should be the floor—not the ceiling—of student achievement. Unfortunately, by that measure, the Boston Public Schools have far to go to reach their destination. In 2005, less than half of the students in any grade level achieved a proficient or advanced score in any MCAS subject. Among students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners, an even lower percentage reached that goal. Since 2002, following an initial period of great improvement, MCAS scores for third and fourth grade literacy have stagnated. These outcomes worry us.

Up to one-third of our students drop out over the course of their high school years, with dire consequences for their earning potential, life expectancy, and life opportunities. Society as a whole is affected by the increased poverty, community and family conflict and social costs incurred by dropouts.

Although a platform for further change has been built over the last eleven years, too much in the school system is still broken. Laudatory goals and good intentions are not enough. Therefore, this roadmap report is a cry for skilled execution driven by a compelling vision. Nothing less than urgently needed transformative change at BPS will achieve academic success for all Boston students. A major paradigm shift is required to have

a high-performing school system with an affirming, supportive culture, where management, principals, and teachers take ownership of their successes, and of their failures, in reaching their common goal: to have all students achieve at proficiency or above.

*This report is divided into nine chapters, each of which addresses an essential area of school reform:*

- Literacy Instruction
- Math Instruction
- Special Education
- The Impact of Trauma on Learning and Behavior
- English Language Learners
- The Dropout Crisis and High School Reform
- Family and Community Engagement
- Human Resources: Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Teachers and Principals
- The Boston Teachers Union–Boston Public Schools Contract

Each chapter outlines BPS’s approach during Superintendent Payzant’s tenure; offers student outcome data; presents the Commission’s case for, and vision of, change; and makes specific recommendations to the new superintendent.

## The Commission’s Vision

**Every child in the Boston Public Schools will be treated with respect and supported to succeed academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.**

BPS will undergo **transformative change**. Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers will be deeply and actively engaged in the dynamic process of moving the system past the status quo.

Increased **accountability** will create a culture of authentic and palpably high expectations for students, teachers, and administrators, and consistent action will be taken when these expectations are not met. All the adults in each school will share the goal of helping every child succeed and will feel accountable to one another for achieving that goal.

Trust between school personnel and parents, students, and community leaders will be built through operational **transparency**. It will be easy for parents, students, and other stakeholders to get information, and their participation and input during decision making will be welcomed.

**Educational equity strategies will eliminate achievement gaps** between white, Asian, Black, and Latino students; between regular and special education students; and between English language learners and native speakers.

## Superintendent Payzant’s Legacy: A Platform for Change

We appreciate the stability and the successes of Dr. Payzant’s long tenure as superintendent. What he has accomplished provides BPS with a solid platform for change. It was not so long ago that BPS was plagued by a frequent turnover of leadership, which stymied any serious efforts at long-lasting reforms. For his longevity as superintendent and for his steady focus on student achievement, all residents of Boston should be sincerely grateful. To Dr. Payzant’s tenure we owe:

- citywide learning standards
- common curricula in math and English and a districtwide pedagogical approach (Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop)

- districtwide Collaborative Coaching and Learning for professional development
- the MyBPS information system for data-driven improvements in teaching and learning
- a solid, systemwide information technology platform
- nearly \$100 million in grants from private sources to support school reform
- the development of pilot schools
- new Early Education Centers and four new schools in Black and Latino neighborhoods
- the Boston Teacher Residency program and the Principal Academy, which attract new teachers and principals into the system.

In full recognition of the achievements of Dr. Payzant’s leadership, we say that now is the time for the new superintendent, the School Committee, and the mayor to grasp the urgency with which the school system needs to be transformed and to move rapidly to do so.

## The Need for Change

The “Need for Change” sections of the chapters that make up this report contain data and concerns particular to the area being covered. However, taking a bird’s eye view, certain common themes emerge across chapters. It is fair, then, to say that improvement in the following areas is essential and will have wide and deep impact:

- *Teacher quality.* Teacher quality is the core of success or failure in school. Recommendations for improving teacher recruitment and retention, professional development, and systems of accountability are found in nearly every chapter of this report.
- *Curricula.* The overwhelming majority of BPS students who are not in advanced-work classes or exam schools do not have access to challenging, rigorous curricula that will prepare them for success in postsecondary education.
- *District leadership.* We repeatedly found that the lack of dynamic leadership, organized support, and collaboration at the top levels stymied the successful implementation of reform initiatives.
- *Family and community engagement.* BPS’s approach to family and community engagement has often been criticized, and the Commission’s findings echo and affirm that critique. The way the system engages with external stakeholders—parents, community members, and community-based organizations wishing to partner with the schools—must be transformed.
- *Respect for parents and students.* In our increasingly multicultural city, cultural competence is a prerequisite for engaging students and reaching parents. Immigrant, Black, Latino and other students and their families frequently feel they are treated disrespectfully within their child’s school and by BPS administration.
- *Special education and English language learning.* The past decade of school reform has largely passed over special education students and English language learners (ELLs)—together a significant portion of the BPS student body. The needs of these students must be a priority for the incoming superintendent.

## Recommendation Highlights

### Assemble a High-Performance Leadership Team

We believe it is critical for the new superintendent to improve the effectiveness of the central leadership organization. Departments must break out of their silos and work together much more effectively to support schools and students. Central leadership staff should consider input from a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and students, before making major decisions about adopting reform initiatives, new curricula, standards, or other changes that significantly affect the system. The new superintendent should be committed to rigorously evaluating reform initiatives, sharing appropriate data widely, and changing course when that turns out to be necessary. Central leadership staff should be held accountable for how their actions affect individual schools and the district as a whole.

We call on the new superintendent to devise a plan to eliminate the achievement gaps among students. Many of the recommendations that follow should be included in this plan.

### Strengthen the Teaching Force

Teacher quality is the core of success or failure in school. Recommendations for improving teacher recruitment and retention, professional development, and systems of accountability are found in nearly every chapter of this report.

#### *Improve Teacher Recruitment and Retention*

- The recruitment, hiring, development, and retention of teachers should be added to “The Six Essentials for Whole School Improvement.”<sup>1</sup>

- BPS must energize recruitment at all levels. Innovative recruitment strategies are needed to increase diversity and to eliminate staff shortages in special education, math, and science.
- Teachers must be hired earlier, so BPS can compete with suburban districts. Principals must take advantage of open postings to hire early.
- Principals and the personnel subcommittees of School Site Councils need to be trained in recruiting, screening, background-checking, and interviewing.
- Teacher retention must be increased. This can be accomplished by strengthening in-class support and mentoring and by frankly addressing cultural competence, race, and class issues as part of professional development.
- Evaluation and monitoring must become high priorities. BPS needs to simplify the performance evaluation process, train principals and personnel subcommittees in evaluation skills, monitor each school for timely hiring, monitor the effectiveness of professional development programs, evaluate principals on their hiring and team building performance, and work with the Boston Teachers Union to create a Peer Assistance Review program.

#### *Maximize the Effectiveness of the Boston Teachers Union-Boston Public Schools Contract*

- BPS and the BTU must negotiate a new contract that puts the educational and developmental needs of students first.
- The new contract should guarantee that legitimate protections for teachers—including seniority and transfer rights—do not force a

principal or headmaster to accept teachers who do not come up to the school's standards for excellent teaching and do not fit into its whole-school improvement plan.

- The superintendent should have the authority to quickly fill vacancies in underperforming schools and ensure that teachers participate in increased professional development.
- Teachers in the excess pool who are not likely to receive teaching positions should be placed in a reserve pool for one year, after which they should be terminated from BPS.
- BPS needs a top-flight management team capable of implementing the contract according to an ambitious timetable.
- Preparations for the next contract that will be negotiated in three years should include a review of the research being compiled by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau on effective contract provisions in other urban school systems and the formation of a team of managers, teachers, union officials, and parents that will obtain first-hand data by visiting school systems that have good contracts. These and other collaborative ventures would help build a much-needed alliance between BTU leadership and BPS managers.

### *Require Comprehensive Professional Development*

- BPS urgently needs to strengthen professional development and teacher support, including implementing Peer Assistance and Review and reinvigorating Collaborative Coaching and Learning. The CCL model needs to be rigorously evaluated to assess its effectiveness, and improvements should be made on the basis of that evaluation.

- Teachers, especially those at that the high school level, should be required to participate in professional development workshops that support standards-based pedagogy and that teach content.
- Every teacher whose classroom includes an ELL student must be trained in English language development and in delivering content instruction understandable to that student. BPS must ensure that coaches are trained in English language acquisition and in ELL literacy development.
- Professional development for regular education and special education teachers should be linked to current practices in standards-based reforms. Teachers should be trained in differentiated instruction by coaches who are dual certified in both regular and special education.
- A professional development program must be created that will help educators examine how their beliefs about the intellectual ability of Black and Latino students influence their educational practices and policy decisions.
- Beginning in fall 2006, responsibility for hiring and evaluating coaches will be shifted to principals and headmasters, who will need support from central administration to carry out this role effectively. At the same time, BPS must devise a mechanism to monitor how well coaches are being utilized.
- All school personnel should be trained in respectful ways of working with families.

### Improve Curricula

- All high schools must have curricula as challenging, broad, and coherent as those at Boston Latin School, Latin Academy, and other highly sought-after high schools.
- Advanced-work curricula must be as available to Black and Latino students as they are to white and Asian-American students.
- The high-standards curriculum must be available to students with disabilities, whether they are in inclusion classrooms or separate settings.
- An institutionalized effort should be set in motion to develop challenging and robust curricula linked to the racial, cultural, and ethnic histories and traditions of BPS students. BPS should assist teachers in developing these curricula, aligning them to the state and national standards, and connecting them to the “mainstream” curriculum.
- BPS must develop materials, curriculum guidelines and standards, and differentiated benchmarks for grade progression appropriate for English language learners. The system has to recognize that mainstream educational curriculum materials (e.g., grade-level basal readers) may not be appropriate tools for building academic competence among ELLs. Also, BPS must ensure that teachers in Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) classrooms are taking advantage of the policy that allows for native-language clarification of academic content.

### Hold Teachers and Staff at All Levels Accountable

BPS should develop a clear set of expectations for principals in the areas of instructional leadership and operational management, and

ensure that these expectations are fulfilled through a training, support, and evaluation system. Expectations for teacher participation in professional development should be set and enforced. The process for evaluating teacher performance should be streamlined and put into practice. Central office leadership must also be held accountable for the quality of its own work, both at the school level and in the district as a whole.

### Improve Literacy and Math Instruction

If followed, the Commission’s recommendations for strengthening the teaching force, improving curricula, and developing new systems of accountability will boost the quality of literacy and math instruction. In addition:

- Ongoing, steady funding for literacy and math coaches must be secured.
- The structured workshop-format English language arts curriculum, currently being used by 34 out of 84 elementary schools, should be examined for possible adoption districtwide.
- Supplemental tutoring, expanded extracurricular activities that reinforce literacy skills, and improved partnerships with nonprofits focused on literacy activities in out-of-school time should become key components in the district’s strategy for helping children acquire literacy skills.
- To ensure that all children, especially those from low-income communities, enter kindergarten with the skills they need, BPS should strengthen its partnerships with nonprofit organizations that serve the literacy needs of preschool children.

- A standards-based high school mathematics curriculum should be selected to replace the current traditional curriculum. The selection process should be widely inclusive and encourage input from a range of stakeholders. High school math teachers will benefit from expanded training on the workshop approach, the new curriculum, and mathematics content.
- Work begun this year to improve the elementary curriculum to ensure students' mastery of basic addition and multiplication facts should be rapidly expanded. Supplemental materials should be introduced to ensure that elementary students develop efficient and reliable strategies for solving multi-digit multiplication and division problems and a strong understanding of place value.
- The elementary and the secondary math offices should lead an effort to align the math curricula from kindergarten through twelfth grade, addressing gaps, overlaps, misalignment with MCAS, and the transitions between elementary and middle school and middle and high school.
- Every student who is prepared should have access to precalculus, calculus, and advanced placement courses.

### **Assure Individual Supports and Increase Inclusion Options in Special Education**

- Hire a special education director who has expertise in inclusion and provide that director with the authority to implement reforms.
- Conduct a review to bring special education into compliance with the law, enable it to participate in standards-based reform, and move it toward an inclusion-based system. Develop a

strategic plan to transform the system based upon that review.

- Immediately implement a series of administrative changes in special education, including the restoration of legal authority to IEP teams to make specific placement decisions and the elimination of waiting lists or delays for referrals, evaluations, placements, or services.
- Ensure that students with disabilities who need a separate classroom or school have access to standards-based reform and to high expectations for academic success.
- Establish an independent Parent Advisory Council that can fulfill its legal mandate.

### **Address Issues of Trauma that Disrupt Student Learning**

- The system needs a strategic and sustainable approach for equipping schools with the expertise and resources necessary to respond to children's exposure to trauma.
- Each school should have the resources to develop an action plan for creating a trauma-sensitive environment. The plan should include staff development, clinical support, teaching strategies, nonacademic supports, partnering with parents, individual and group supports for children, linkages with mental health professionals, and a review of the school's policies and procedures.
- The role trauma and other mental health issues may be playing in rule-abiding behavior at school should be taken into account, and each school should reevaluate its discipline policies and protocols in that light. Emphasis should be placed on reducing suspensions and expulsions through the use of positive

behavior supports and other trauma-sensitive approaches.

- Every school should have a full-time student support coordinator to ensure that the mental health needs of children are met and to maximize and coordinate the use of external resources.

### **Improve Instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs)**

- There should be a comprehensive, districtwide system for identifying each and every ELL, placing them in appropriate programs with all necessary services, and assessing their progress in English in an accurate and timely manner.
- The needs of ELLs must be considered when making and implementing all policy and program decisions. Administrators at every level of BPS should have expertise in second language learning issues, programs, and curriculum.
- ELL students with disabilities must be ensured appropriate services. This will require ongoing collaboration between the department of language learning and support and the department of special education.
- BPS's literacy programs for ELLs have proven successful for students who have had little or no formal schooling in their native countries. These programs should be strengthened and expanded to accommodate all the children who need them.
- Two-way bilingual programs, which have been very successful, should be expanded to more schools and to more languages.

### **Address Leadership and Organizational Barriers to Successful High School Renewal; Decrease the Dropout Rate**

- Clear goals for High School Renewal should be established, and the resources to achieve those goals need to be coordinated.
- The new superintendent must appoint a deputy superintendent who has the clear authority to implement High School Renewal.
- More attention needs to be paid to curriculum and pedagogy.
- Small schools and small learning communities must be funded at the necessary levels.
- BPS must make sure that new high schools can provide small populations of students with the education they need, whether they are ELLs, students with disabilities, or students capable of doing advanced-placement work.
- New dropout prevention strategies are needed. Thus far, small schools have not, in themselves, produced a demonstrable reduction in dropouts.
- BPS should follow the dropout prevention and dropout recovery recommendations in *Too Big To Be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America*, a 2006 report by the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force.
- BPS needs to develop new methods of identifying students at risk of dropping out because of poor attendance or course failures, and it must fulfill its promise to provide an adult mentor for each student. In addition, there should be a range of programs for students at

risk of dropping out, so that a wide variety of learning needs can be met.

- Information on the full spectrum of educational options for dropouts should be made available, and outreach to dropouts should be increased.

### **Transform Family and Community Engagement to a School-Based System**

- The number of school-based family and community outreach coordinators (FCOCs) should be increased each year until there is a family engagement staff in every school. The new superintendent should develop a strategy for establishing fully funded and staffed family centers in each school by school year 2010.
- It is up to the new superintendent to ensure that the family and community engagement effort is led by a strong deputy superintendent who has a clear, transformative vision and who can create a sound, adequately staffed middle management team that will support and assist the school-based FCOCs.
- BPS should maintain dedicated staff to support parents of children with disabilities and limited-English-proficient families to help them navigate the system. The bilingual outreach specialists should focus on those schools with large ELL populations.
- Parents' capacity to support their children's learning should be bolstered through trainings and workshops on such subjects as effective parent-teacher conferences, literacy and math skills, parenting skills, parents' rights, etc. Parents also need training in leadership skills and in how to help develop and implement whole-school improvement plans.

- It is BPS's responsibility to make sure that parents are aware of available services and supports as well as school and district policies, including MCAS prep support, advanced-work placement procedures, new residency requirements, the bilingual waiver process, and special education rights, etc.

- There should be an active and well-functioning School Parent Council and School Site Council in every school, supported by training in leadership skills for parents and hiring skills for principals and those on School Site Council personnel subcommittees.

- BPS has to fully grasp the importance of collaborating with community-based organizations, and it should regard strong parent and community constituencies as assets.

- BPS should evaluate principals on their success in increasing family and community involvement.

- The entire family engagement system should be assessed for effectiveness, and performance measures devised for all staff.

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We hope this report inspires vigorous public conversation and debate about the issues we have raised. We do not intend for the debate to center on the past or to devolve into finger-pointing or casting blame. We want the debate to be about the future—what should Bostonians expect from their public school system? How can we overcome the many obstacles to our vision of providing a high-quality public education to every single one of our children?

Boston is blessed to have a wealth of dedicated people, both within and outside the school system, who are committed to this goal. With a new resolve, a renewed sense of urgency, and a determination to put our children's interests first, we are optimistic that Boston will succeed in building the best big-city public school system in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Boston's whole-school improvement effort is organized around these six essentials: "ONE: Focus on *literacy and mathematics*. TWO: Use *student work and data* to identify student needs, improve instruction and assess progress. THREE: Focus *professional development* to offer teachers and principals the skills they need to improve instruction. FOUR: Identify and replicate *best practices* for instruction. FIVE: Align all *resources* with the instructional focus. SIX: Engage *families, community and partners* to support Whole School Improvement."

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