

# BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## **Remarks of Dr. Carol R. Johnson**

Superintendent, Boston Public Schools

### **August Institute for Principals and Headmasters**

Boston Convention and Exhibition Center

August 14, 2008

Good morning, and welcome back to the new school year. I hope you have learned new ideas or been reaffirmed in your efforts over the last two days. We know how busy your jobs are, and we thank you for prioritizing this special time for us to come together. It seems like only yesterday — but, indeed, it has been almost one year to the day since I joined the BPS family. It truly has been a year of listening, learning, and growing in my appreciation of the tremendous efforts you undertake to make our schools, our classrooms, and learning, better for every single child. With the leadership of Mayor Menino, as well as Chairperson Elizabeth Reilinger and the entire Boston School Committee of the Boston Public Schools, I am honored to be here and grateful to serve with educators who daily dedicate their lives to the children of this city. I want to welcome two new School Committee Members, Mr. Claudio Martinez and Mr. Michael O'Neill. They join Mrs. Alfreda Harris, our longest serving School Committee Member, Mrs. Marchelle Raynor, Mrs. Helen Dájer, and Reverend Gregory Groover, Vice Chair of the School Committee, who is here today. I thank all of them for their ongoing support of our efforts.

Let me begin by introducing our team and then I will ask each of them to introduce new principals that they supervise [introduce team].

Let me also acknowledge our newly appointed Boston Principal Fellows. We welcome these eight individuals to the Principals' and Headmasters' Institute.

I know that for some of you in this audience today — summer was busy, and here we start again. I sincerely thank those of you who helped with summer programs, with professional development, and in some cases, moving from one location to another. I offer a very special welcome to those new to the principalship or new as a headmaster this year. You join a group of colleagues who relentlessly work to advocate for children, who often walk a tight rope between Court Street and their community, and who daily go far beyond the call of duty, to better the life circumstances of the students we serve. The principals and headmasters of Boston have a tremendous job, and few people recognize how many challenges are managed without delays and without headlines. I thank you for all you do, and I am truly grateful to work with you. This year we focus on **TEAM**.

So also this year, we have broadened our tent to include a few additional members from your team, so that we might begin this year with an agenda that reflects true collaboration. And just as no superintendent can achieve success alone - neither can any principal work in isolation. We do need the collective energy and effort of every team member to win. As the late Seattle Superintendent John Stanford (a superintendent with a military background) often stated, “Victory is in the classroom.” Hopefully, the work we plan for this week — and the work we carry out this year and over the next few years — will accelerate students’ performance; will increase our graduation rates; and will help us to move our students to proficiency, to working with a “growth mindset” and being good citizens as well as being prepared for post-secondary education.

Over the last 12 months, I have had the good fortune to see, learn, and dream a lot. One of my first and, perhaps, most inspiring events was Countdown to Kindergarten. I watched as hundreds of parents and 4- and 5-year-olds descended upon the Children’s Museum. The picture was priceless, and the energy and enthusiasm electric. Today, I’m proud that we have over 2,100 students in our pre-kindergarten program. Thanks to Mayor Menino, this year we are adding sites at the Adams, the Condon, the Hale, the Lyndon, the Eliot, and the Roosevelt. We proudly boast that four of our early learning centers and early education centers (Baldwin ELC, East Boston EEC, Haynes EEC and West Zone ELC) have achieved NAEYC accreditation.

Last year, I met regularly with BSAC, our Boston Student Advisory Council, composed of students from most of our high schools. Those meetings were tremendously inspiring and,

sometimes, endlessly challenging. They asked about homework policies, cell phone use, and how best to give feedback to teachers and principals about their school experience. They went to the Mayor to request a student-developed civic engagement course, and they wondered if their voices were really heard when they came to us with concerns. I'm proud to say we did listen — we have tried to respond. We will work this year to create a district- and school-specific climate survey to solicit feedback; and teachers are working with a small team of students to develop the high school civic engagement course. We have great students, and it was clear that they expected to be heard when over 400 of them flooded Madison Park to tell us how to prevent students from dropping out. I knew we were headed in the right direction when TechBoston Academy students created, designed, and organized their own technology conference right here at the Convention Center. Students taught the sessions to other high school students, and what a display of talent, teaching, and learning: Power Point, web design, creating you own business, composing music, becoming a D.J., selling your services to small businesses, solving problems, and creating tools to make our lives better were among an array of sessions offered. We have great students, and our work, the most important and essential work in America today, is to build the bridges that will elevate and accelerate our students from a place that takes them nowhere, to a journey that maximizes their potential and makes our city great and our world more peaceful and prosperous.

Boston has a long history of excellence and innovation, and over the last 12 months, I saw no shortage of either. I don't have enough time today to tell you everything I learned, but I simply can't resist the chance to at least give you a year at a glance. I watched schools like the Russell Elementary move from the State's Commonwealth Priority list to being a school in good standing and making Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years. We await the data from the State for spring 2008, and we are hopeful that your efforts will be evident in that data — on with my journey...

Families and staff listened as every single Perry K-8 School student performed on the stage in South Boston, with science teacher, Richard Squillante, playing the piano as they sang. Richard is a teacher who understands that sometimes you expand beyond your job title (Science Teacher) to make sure students do get the arts and music experiences that inspire them. They understand that the arts and music must be available to all, not just some of our students. I marveled at the students in our ELL Fast Forward summer programs, as they confidently stood giving great reports and presentations, performed skits, and dances — some

not speaking a word of English when they arrived — but within five weeks making progress in English, math, reading, and learning to be scholars. Thanks to Frank Barnes, Chief Accountability Officer, and his team, for creating this opportunity for our learners. I cheered when the Brighton Bengals (with BCLA and ACC students) won the High School Football Superbowl, and I watched East Boston High School and Charlestown High School (both girls and boys) compete in basketball. But I cheered even louder when the graduating seniors on these teams proudly announced their post-secondary college plans, and one Brighton High Bengal heads off to Harvard this fall, along with over 3,000 other graduating seniors who are college-bound to community colleges and 4-year colleges locally and around the nation.

It was certainly reaffirming to have several of Boston's small high schools honored by EdVestors this year, and we are especially proud of Headmaster Ligia Noriega and the students and staff at Excel High School for winning the *Thomas Payzant School on the Move Prize*. This summer, with the leadership of Irvin Scott, we trained more than 90 teachers to teach Advanced Placement courses, as we expand rigor throughout our high schools.

Boston is well represented individually and collectively. We are proud of leaders like Hernandez Principal, Margarita Muñiz, who was recently appointed to the Board of the Nellie Mae Foundation, and Boston Latin Academy student, Maria Centeia, who was honored by Mayor Menino for Community Service this year and who has been accepted to Dartmouth, Princeton, and Harvard, among others. It's no accident that the Hale, Kilmer, Mason, and the Quincy Schools were listed among Boston Magazine's 100 Best Elementary Schools in Eastern Massachusetts, or that USA Today saluted among its all USA Teacher Teams, the Hernandez School Team — or that Boston Latin School continues to rank among Newsweek magazine's top public high schools, ranking 78 out of 1,200 schools in the nation. We applaud their efforts even as we work to put in safety nets for students not on track. We had over 100 students participate in our Credit Recovery program this summer, an effort to rescue students behind in 1 or 2 course credits, but who, with a little support, will graduate in our summer graduation ceremony in two weeks at historic Faneuil Hall. In a few weeks, we will proudly cut the ribbon not only on the brand new, beautiful Jeremiah Burke High School, but also on the new Roosevelt-Hemenway K-8 School.

While today I do not have data yet from the State regarding MCAS, we hope that prior to the first day of school, we will have some preliminary information regarding our proficiency scores,

graduation rates, and our overall movement toward making Adequately Yearly Progress available to you before the first week of school.

And while MCAS and NAEP scores are important, nothing quite replaces the audience of 1,000 boys at UMass-Boston who had been involved in our 10 Boys Project. Thanks to Snowden International High School Headmaster Gloria Coulter, Justin's (11<sup>th</sup> grader) insights about how he and his "10 Kings" had created 20 kings became the model for others to follow. These students now understand the importance of school success; but perhaps as importantly, are making it their mission to convince 10 others to think the same. Dr. Janet Williams will help us to continue this work that was initiated by Dr. Ingrid Carney. We have already received a grant from EdVestors, and we hope to expand to other schools.

Fortunately, throughout Boston, teachers, principals, parents, and partners are helping us to see the power of the arts in student engagement. I watched a trumpet improve attendance at the Edwards Middle School, and a connection to the visual arts eliminate behavior problems at the Warren-Prescott K-8 School. Thanks to the leadership of Kim Lewis in our Equity Office, the 4- and 5-year olds over at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration, the beautiful and precious babies from the Baldwin ELC sang about freedom / justice, and students from the Marshall Elementary proudly filled the stage with joyous voices — confident that, indeed, they have the capacity to achieve at high levels. It goes without saying that Principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson was proud! When I visited Boston Arts Academy, it was easy to enjoy and appreciate the jazz band, the vocal chorale, and the plethora of arts, music, and dance everywhere. But it was a high school student molding a sculpture that caught my attention — the base seemed busy, confusing, conflicted, and troubled, and the top revealed a small hand reaching upward — the student told me the hand represented him — and he explained how he had learned to rise above all the chaos in his life and his community through the arts. This summer, Co-Headmasters Linda Nathan and Carmen Torres opened their doors to educators locally and from around the country to share their expertise. But arts aren't and shouldn't be limited to the Arts Academy. I saw a great performance at the Boston Adult Technical Academy and enjoyed a philosophical discussion with Greater Egleston students at the Mass College of Art and Design. We thank the leaders in our alternative schools for putting arts in their classes.

I want to especially thank all of you for responding to our Arts Education Survey this spring. A survey addressing arts education in schools went out to all BPS principals at the end of May

2008. The survey sought to assess the current scope of arts education within the Boston Public Schools. One Hundred thirty-nine (139) of 144 (97%) schools responded. The extraordinary response rate speaks to the importance you place on arts education in BPS. In addition, 4 schools (Holmes Elementary, Winship Elementary, Donald McKay K-8, and Boston International High) were chosen through a raffle of all participating schools to receive \$500 for art supplies. Thanks so much for your speedy response!

### **Data Summary**

The survey broke down arts education into four major disciplines: music, dance, theater and visual art. Key findings include:

- Music is the most popular arts discipline for pre-kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, with visual arts beginning to pick up in popularity in middle school.
- By high school, visual arts are far more common than music.
- The availability of theater arts and dance is surprisingly low in high school.
- Overall, 70% of students are reported to receive some arts instruction during the school day.
- The percentage of students reached dropped dramatically as grade-level increases, from a high of 89% of elementary (and 88% of K-8) students, to 62% by middle school and only 28% by high school.
- Two hundred fifty-three (253) art teachers (full- and part-time) provided arts education in the schools during the 2007-2008 school year. Forty-one (41) percent of these were visual art teachers, 33% were music teachers, 15% were theater, and 11% were theater teachers.
- Regarding the question of funding for arts education, the school budget was the most significant source noted (93%).
- Private donations / grants and in-kind contributions from non-profit partners were the next greatest sources, at 30% and 16% respectively.
- Limitations to the school budget was overwhelmingly noted (91%) as the number one factor that prevented them from offering more arts education.
- The second most common response was a lack of public or private external funding (60%).
- The third most common response was “Not enough time in the school day to offer arts instruction,” which was reported by nearly half of schools (46%) as a factor that prevented them from offering more arts education.

- More than half of responding schools listed at least one outside partner that provided arts education during school hours.
- Thirty-nine (39) percent of respondents listed at least one partner offering out-of-school time arts education instruction.

Boston has no shortage of excellence and innovation, whether you watched the Carter School students use the new outdoor science experiments, the Rogers Middle School mainstream many students into regular classes, or the Urban Debate Competition at Charlestown High School on a cold Saturday morning, your efforts captivating our students minds. Despite what you read in the newspaper, Boston Public Schools are on the move. I watched almost 1,500 students, under the leadership of Headmaster Lynne Mooney Teta and Music and Band Director Mr. Paul Pitts at Boston Latin School, celebrate music over a 2-day period. I watched students and staff from the Timilty Middle, Health Careers Academy, and the O'Bryant showcase their knowledge at the Science Fair ... and I had a chance to see the wonderful display of visual arts from our students at City Hall, from the Mary Lyon K-8 School and the Harvard-Kent. I learned a lot from our principals at the cluster breakfasts and saw top-notch 1<sup>st</sup> grade work at the Quincy and the Hennigan, observed the literacy efforts at the Winthrop, witnessed the partnership between the Eliot K-8 School and the Old North Church, and the work in several clusters with Boston Connects. I also had the pleasure of receiving letters and calls from parents who were not angry or upset, but rather who called to say how pleased they were that they had chosen BPS. You know that we have great students and absolutely great people, like all of you, who do care and who do want success for our students. This hasn't been an easy year for some of us — we struggled with budget challenges; and 2 days of lots of snow — and there was also sadness and loss — and yet despite tragedy, I watched our crisis team and staff at the Timilty, the Gavin, and the O'Bryant rally to support our students and their families through their grieving. The loss of any child, whatever the circumstance, is tragic.

It is truly amazing how schools have mobilized an array of parents and volunteers to join the BPS family. Last year, the Edwards Middle School had 18 families who listed them as their 1<sup>st</sup> school choice for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This year, over 200 families listed the Edwards as their first or second choice. The Edwards did not get a new building — it wasn't the bricks, buses, or bleachers — but it was the leader and the teachers. The vision, growth mindset, and the energy of Principal Jeff Riley and his team made the difference. There were no seats left at the McCormack or the Timilty as mentors; partners and presenters arrived to create a community

network of support for students. Principal Valeria Lowe-Barehmi and her team, and the McCormack staff with Assistant Principals Cox and Knight, never stop believing in our children's capacity to achieve greatness and the importance of bringing the community into our classrooms to develop our students' talent. Yesterday, you heard from UMass-Boston researchers about five schools making a significant difference with Latino students (the Bradley, O'Donnell, McKay, Fenway, TechBoston); and we also know that schools like the Haley, Beethoven, Hernandez, Quincy Lower, East Boston Early Learning Center, Tobin, Mattahunt, Everett and Ellison/Parks ELC are loved by their families not because they are exam schools or pilots, but because they are great places to learn and grow.

Today, we know what it takes to achieve excellence; we have examples of innovation throughout our district with Pilots and non-Pilots, Horace Mann Charters, Boston Connects, small and large High Schools, Early Learning Centers and Early Childhood Initiatives, but we cannot be satisfied or resolved if our efforts benefit only some and not all of our community's children.

What we want for our children and how will we get there is the subject of the next segment of my comments today.

This summer, our academic team began the process of charting a course to excellence for all. We have established performance goals for the district, and when we receive our most recent 2008 spring data, we will work with you to set specific school targets. We have a theory of action to focus our work and a set of intentional strategies that we believe build on our prior work and on what you have heard this week from Freeman Hrabowski, Carol Dweck, Stacey Childress, and Elizabeth City.

This is not a plan of action for schools alone — rather it requires much of Court Street as well. We can't expect victory in the classroom if you and your school teams are without the support tools, materials, and environment that encourage success.

So let me walk you through what is our initial plan. No plan is perfect, and the truth is that we will always need to modify and adjust — to meet the individual needs of schools and to customize responses in ways that meet student needs. What we can't do any longer is

randomly focus with only good intentions. Intentions must be followed by strategic actions and resources that produce results. We welcome your feedback!

[Power Point]

**Phase II** – Today, we focus primarily on our academic Acceleration Agenda. Over the next few weeks, we will also embark on the arduous task of beginning to put together a plan to become more effective and efficient on the operational side of the district. We must use facilities wisely, and make sure existing programs are housed well; we must examine the escalating costs of transportation and food services, and identify resources that will help us to better support and align our academic agenda. Later this fall, I will present to the School Committee and affected stakeholders our plan to reprogram or consolidate schools so that we accomplish two goals: We will expand quality programs, and we will improve our efficiency so that more dollars can be returned to schools. Again, “Victory is in the classroom.”

We are approaching a critical juncture in the district’s history. We must do whatever it takes to achieve excellence and equity, continue to be innovative as we respond to the ever-changing needs of our students. We must make sure our limited resources are spent on what will ultimately produce results — proficiency and 4-year graduation and acceleration for all. Getting results, conducting the analysis and the planning necessary cannot be completed in a few months or in a single year. The operational and fiscal staff are undertaking some initial steps, and we expect that during the 2008-2009 school year, we will develop a long-term, multi-year strategy that will help the district review trends and establish a strategic direction aligned to our academic agenda to guide our work over the next decade.