

Youth Transitions Partners

Boston Private Industry Council

Boston Parent Organizing Network

Boston Public Schools
High School Renewal
Unified Student Services
Alternative Education

Boston Youth Service Network

Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services

Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University

Commonwealth Corporation
Jobs for the Future
Youth Opportunity Boston

Black Ministerial Alliance

Boston After School & Beyond

The Boston Foundation

Boston Higher Education Partnership

Boston's One-Stop Career Centers

Boston Plan for Excellence

Boston Police Department

Boston Student Advisory Committee

Boston Urban Youth Foundation

Boston WIA Youth Council

Bunker Hill Community College

Center for Collaborative Education

Communities for People

COMPASS

Comprehensive School Age Parenting Program

Diamond Educators

Emerging Leaders Program, UMass Boston

Friends of the Shattuck Shelter

The Home for Little Wanderers

Massachusetts Department of Education

Massachusetts Department of Social Services

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Massachusetts Department of Youth Services

Roxbury Community College
Youth Advocacy Project



Too Big

To Be Seen:

The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America

A Report from the
BOSTON YOUTH TRANSITIONS TASK FORCE

May 2006



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This report represents the first year of research and analysis conducted by the Youth Transitions Task Force, a coalition of non-profit organizations and government agencies convened by the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). This work was pursued with financial support from the Youth Transitions Funders Group, a consortium of national foundations that includes the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The text was prepared by Kathy Hamilton and Neil Sullivan of the PIC and Andrew Bundy and Lainy Fersh of Community Matters, an independent consulting firm. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Too Big To Be Seen:

The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America

INTRODUCTION

On October 22, 2004, Mayor Thomas M. Menino challenged the leaders of 18 community organizations and government agencies to put Boston at the forefront of a national effort to address a situation that remains invisible to most Americans. He asked these leaders to tackle the dropout crisis – an issue that has become too big to be seen.

With support from national foundations, this team came together to form the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force. Its purpose is to assess, document and address the issue in a strategic way.

Boston is well positioned to lead the nation in responding to the dropout crisis. The city is already recognized as a national leader in key aspects of school reform and youth employment. Historically, the Boston Compact, the city's collaborative school improvement agreement, has emphasized reducing the dropout rate as an essential complement to raising academic achievement.

In its first year, the Task Force produced the following:

- New data on struggling students and dropouts in Boston
- Documentation of the experience of youth, parents, teachers and providers
- An analysis of the systems in place to respond to struggling students and dropouts
- A mobilized, diverse team of leaders in many fields, all working together
- An emerging plan of action for improving the situation with systemic reforms

This report details the most pertinent quantitative data and qualitative research generated by the project, offers an analysis of existing resources and programs, and frames the challenges for the year ahead. It also invites readers to consider the ways that they might engage in the coming years' efforts.

By facing these challenges, Boston's leaders and institutions can help change the life course of thousands of young people in Boston, and strengthen the city's economic and social prospects. This report begins to map a strategic approach that can enable those who hover on the edge of dropping out and those who have already left school to reclaim their place on a pathway to education, employment, and future success.

There are two key elements to any credible response to the dropout problem.

- **Dropout Prevention:** ensuring that struggling students *stay in school*, and
- **Dropout Recovery:** enabling youth and young adults *who have dropped out* to re-enter school, obtain an alternative education, or explore or begin a career.

Gathering More and Better Data

In the first year, Youth Transitions partners collected two sets of data on struggling students and dropouts:

- **Quantitative Data: What do the available numbers tell us about the scale and nature of the dropout problem?** Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies is the lead partner for primary research on Boston's dropout problem. The Boston Public Schools, the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services, the

By facing these challenges, Boston's leaders and institutions can help change the life course of thousands of young people in Boston, and strengthen the city's economic and social prospects.



Commonwealth Corporation, and the Massachusetts Departments of Education, Social Services, Transitional Assistance and Youth Services all contributed substantially to this research.

- **Qualitative Research: What do youth, parents, teachers and youth service providers say about why students struggle in school and drop out?** A team, including the Boston Parent Organizing Network, the Emerging Leaders program at the University of Massachusetts–Boston, the Boston Private Industry Council and the Commonwealth Corporation, conducted a series of focus groups, surveys and interviews with hundreds of youth, parents, teachers and youth workers.

Several public and private research organizations helped gather this research:

The Boston Public Schools Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation reports dropouts annually, and provided special studies of sub-groups and risk indicators.

The Massachusetts Department of Education reports state and district dropout information annually. It released a study in October 2005 that illuminated current dropout trends in the state and in Boston, by race-ethnic group, gender and grade level.

The state Departments of Social Services, Youth Services and Transitional Assistance report various educational data elements of the youth in their caseload.

The Center for Labor Market Studies conducted research on dropouts using the 2000 Census and other data sources, and conducted analysis of raw data supplied by the Boston Public Schools.

Mapping Systems of Education and Support

At the same time, the Youth Transitions Task Force began mapping and assessing existing Boston public and community-based schools, alternative schools, support services, and youth employment and career programs.

They asked, “What is the terrain of organizations, resources and services for struggling students and dropouts, and how does it work?” The result is an analysis of how systems within the Boston Public Schools, state agencies and community organizations currently serve youth, highlighting assets and gaps in the educational and service systems.

Mobilizing Leaders

In December of 2004, the initial group of 18 organizations began meeting to strategize and divide the labor for the Youth Transitions project in Boston. One year later, the number of partners engaged has grown to over 30. In that time, the group has successfully built a wider constituency for its work.

In public and media venues, the Youth Transitions Task Force worked to strengthen the public will to support struggling students and dropouts effectively. A *Boston Globe* editorial heralded the initial Youth Transitions grant. Organizers from the Boston Parent Organizing Network presented their parent research on cable television. Dr. Andrew Sum of the Center for Labor Market Studies presented his graduate and dropout findings to business leaders and the Boston Headmasters Association. Boston Public Schools Deputy Superintendent Christopher Coxon and Private Industry Council Executive Director Neil Sullivan shared research results in testimony with the Boston School Committee and the education subcommittee of the Boston City Council. Participants from the Emerging Leaders Program at the University of Massachusetts–Boston presented the results of their research to Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

The Task Force used the systems analysis, along with the quantitative data and qualitative research, to identify priority areas for program and policy change, and drafted the recommendations.¹ These recommendations are summarized on page 4, and fully described on page 20.

Too Big To Be Seen:

The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Boston, under the decade-long leadership of Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, has achieved well documented success in improving the quality of its public school education and outcomes for its graduates. How can Boston do for its struggling students and dropouts what it has begun to do for its graduates?

This report captures the first year of a two-year strategic assessment of the dropout problem in Boston, with the express purpose of mapping a set of answers to that question.

1. What the Numbers Tell Us: Quantitative Data

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) reported 1,567 students dropped out in 2004.² These students did not transfer to another district, enter an alternative school or return to their country of origin: they left school without a diploma.

Boston is losing as many as a third of its youth to the dropout crisis.³ The 2004 figures are not an anomaly: each year, some 3,000 students graduate from the BPS, and roughly half that many drop out.

Today, well over 8,000 youth and young adults in Boston are out of school with no diploma or GED certificate.⁴ Black and Latino youth are more than twice as likely to drop out as White and Asian students. 60 percent of dropouts are male.

Nationally, the situation is much worse. In fact, Boston does a relatively good job in limiting the number of high school students who leave without a diploma. Other major cities have dropout rates approaching 50%. The total number of dropouts across the country is almost 4 million.⁵

Recently, researchers have been paying increased attention to the problem. A number of reports argue that there is a “hidden dropout crisis” in the US, and that the nation must confront this crisis, directly and comprehensively.⁶

Dropping out has dire consequences. A college graduate earns three times the lifetime revenue of a dropout, and lives nearly a decade longer.⁷ A student who drops out

risks closing the door on a lifetime of learning, work and family support options.

The dropout problem hurts all of society, fueling poverty, exacerbating conflicts in the community, and raising public costs for health care, housing, law enforcement and social services. Nationally, the dropout problem wreaks economic havoc, costing the US \$200 billion each year in lost productivity and tax revenue.⁸

Fortunately, the value of a high school diploma in Boston continues to increase. Graduates of the BPS go to college at rates above the national norm, suburbs included, and are more likely to be gainfully employed than their peers across the country.⁹

In sharp contrast, dropouts fare worse in Boston than almost anywhere else. Boston ranks 44th out of the 50 largest central US cities for employment among young dropouts.¹⁰ Boston is a particularly punishing environment for young Black male dropouts, who earn less and are more likely to be institutionalized than their White, Asian and Latino counterparts.

In Boston – more than anywhere else – a high school diploma marks the dramatic divide between the prospect for success on one side and isolation from opportunity on the other.

2. What Youth and Adults Tell Us: Qualitative Research

Why do BPS students drop out? Youth Transitions research findings – based on surveys, interviews and focus groups with students, parents, teachers and youth service providers – show that many factors are at work.

- The relationships between students and teachers – and other caring adults – are the most important factor in students’ school experience, whether positive or negative
- The disruptiveness of peers in schools causes students to feel distracted and unsafe
- The pace of instruction – whether too fast or too slow – is an important reason that youth give for leaving school, yet teachers voice limited power to tailor instruction

- Personal problems cause youth to leave school
- Students in small alternative programs appreciate the increased attention and the opportunity to work at their own pace
- Parents want better communication with the school staff and a school climate that is welcoming and respectful.
- Teachers feel that students' dropping out is beyond their control
- Alternative and support programs experience a demand for services that exceeds their capacity
- Weak academic skills can cripple efforts to recover dropouts in "second chance" programs
- Economic needs can compete with pursuing education after dropping out

3. Mapping the Systems of Education, Dropout Recovery and Youth Support

A diverse network of educational, employment and training programs serve Boston dropouts and those at risk of dropping out, much of it community-based. In the past decade, the BPS has committed major resources to create 25 new small high schools, with the specific intent of heightening student engagement and performance. Boston is a cradle of innovation in the areas of alternative education or "second chance" programs, youth employment and career exploration. State and community agencies with responsibility for pregnant, parenting, abused, neglected and incarcerated youth also offer a range of support services.

Despite these assets, however, three major problems persist:

- There are not enough programs to support struggling students and youth who have dropped out.

Each year, Boston's array of community-based alternative educational and dropout reclamation services offer seats to approximately 1,200 dropouts – about 15% of the 8,000 dropouts in the city. The current capacity of existing BPS alternative programs – a mere 1,400 seats – is much smaller than the number of students who need these services.¹¹

- No one major public agency or public system owns the dropout problem, so existing initiatives are not as well coordinated as they should be for maximum impact.

In general, schools and programs serving students on the margins operate on the margins themselves. Chronically underfunded, with constantly shifting budgets and funding streams, programs understandably focus on working with youth rather than initiating coordination.

- There is no unified outreach approach to contact and work with dropouts, so many dropouts fall between the cracks.

Though there are outreach and support initiatives that target youth who are at risk for various reasons – court involvement, foster-care involvement, early parenting – there is no system-wide outreach and referral mechanism dedicated to dropouts. This is a huge gap because dropouts need information on the reconnection options that do exist and, more importantly, moral support to connect with recovery programs after experiencing failure.

4. Taking Action for Improvement: Recommendations

Spurred by this juxtaposition of data, pronounced need, and inadequate institutional capacity, the Youth Transitions Task Force developed the following recommendations for innovation and change over the coming years. In Year Two, the Youth Transitions Task Force seeks to mobilize more leaders in the public and private sectors to:

- Refine dropout data collection methods and deepen the analysis of the crisis
- Develop early intervention strategies for struggling students and an outreach and referral system for dropouts
- Increase the number and variety of alternative education and training opportunities
- Create school climates that are welcoming and respectful for students and parents
- Increase coordination among schools, alternative programs and city agencies to close gaps in the second chance system
- Develop revenue strategies to support alternative programs, early intervention and outreach to dropouts

See page 20 for full text of recommendations.

WHAT THE NUMBERS TELL US

QUANTITATIVE DATA

By most measures, Boston is doing as well as – if not better than – any major US city. In its decade-long push for better schools and more positive outcomes for youth, Boston has yielded many impressive results.

Boston Public School (BPS) graduates' college attendance is at an all-time high

The college-going rate of Boston Public School (BPS) graduates has climbed steadily over the past decade, from a low of 62% in 1993 to the record high of 76% for the class of 2004.¹²

BPS graduates outperform their national peers in education and work

Boston graduates outperform their national peers in college attendance. 76% of the class of 2004 were enrolled in college or postsecondary training a year after high school; 71% were in two or four year colleges, compared with 67% nationally.¹³

BPS graduates do better in the job market than their peers, nationally. The employment advantage is particularly remarkable for graduates of color, all of whom do markedly

better than their national counterparts. Black BPS graduates have a 54% rate of employment, compared to 37% for their national peers, a 17% advantage.¹⁴

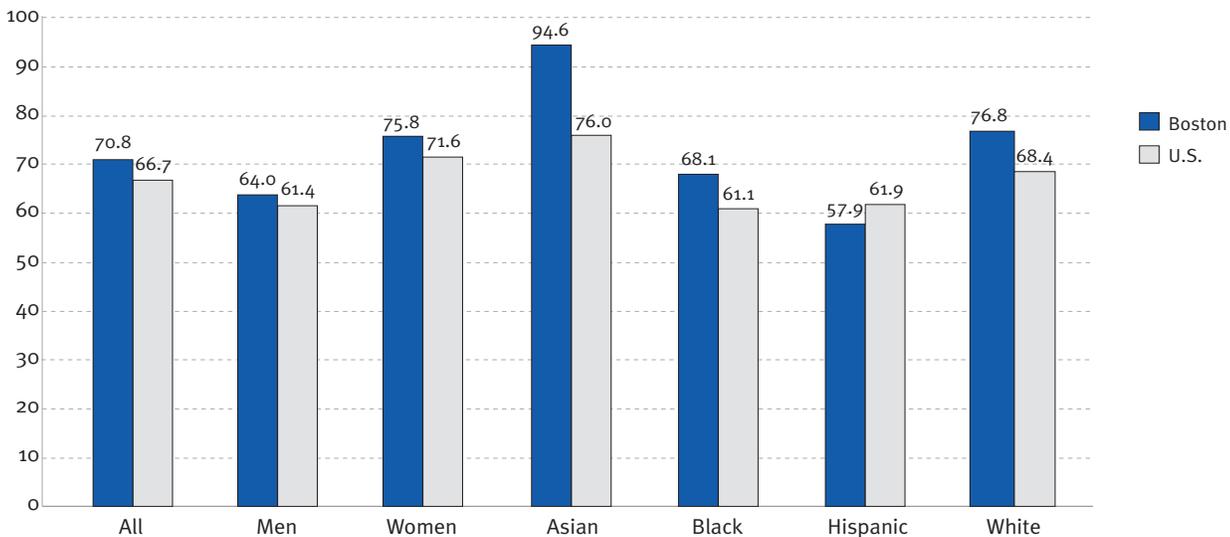
Boston has incomplete data on dropouts and struggling students

The first step in tackling the dropout challenge is to understand the true size and nature of the problem. While some aggregated data on dropouts and some of their characteristics do exist, neither Boston nor the nation has developed a consistent means of generating high quality data on the number, characteristics and circumstances of youth who drop out.

Across the nation, school districts face legal, practical and psychological barriers to getting good dropout data. Privacy law protects the confidentiality of youth and families, restricting access to some of the information that might enable schools and programs to work together more effectively to help youth. Confidentiality concerns and jurisdictional conflict impede communication between

Boston graduates outperform their national peers in college attendance. 71% were in two or four year colleges, compared with 67% nationally.

College Attendance Rates* of Boston Public School Graduates Compared to U.S. Counterparts from the Class of 2004



* College attendance rates include only those students who were attending a 2 or 4 year college.

public schools, state agencies, community organizations, and the parents and youth they serve. School districts, though required by law to report the number of students who drop out, do not have systems to track students after they leave.

Understanding Dropout Rates

Although differences exist in the way researchers and systems calculate and document dropout data, these guidelines provide a basic overview of the numbers used in this report.

An **annual dropout rate** is the percentage of students who drop out during a single year. The number most commonly used in media reports, it can be helpful in comparing year-to-year trends in a school, or in comparing between schools, subgroups of students, or systems.

A **four-year, dropout rate** usually measures the percentage of 9th graders who leave a school before graduating in the 12th grade. It is projected based on the annual rate of one class over four years. It is useful for understanding how likely it is that a freshman in a given school or school system will drop out. It is also useful in helping the public understand the scope of the dropout problem in a school or school district.

The **graduation rate** (or **on-time graduation rate**) is the percentage of students who graduate from a school or school district within a period of time, usually four years. There are a number of different methods for calculating graduation rates.

The **status dropout rate** shows how many dropouts there are within a population, based on Census information. This rate is useful for understanding the scale of the challenge in a community.

Further, schools' incentives to report data accurately are skewed; researchers agree that school districts consistently underreport the dropout rate. Schools can be penalized rather than rewarded for diligently tracking dropout rates, potentially losing per-pupil funding for declining enrollment as a result of careful dropout reporting.

Finally, there is no agreement on the best way to document the dropout rate. To get started, a snapshot of the most common methods in use is to the left.

A third of BPS students drop out over a four year period

Using BPS data, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) projects 30.7% of students in the class of 2007 will drop out in the four years between 9th grade and graduation. This includes students who transferred into the BPS in high school and later dropped out.

By including only students who begin the 9th grade in a Boston public school in its analysis, and giving them five years to graduate, the BPS places the percentage of 9th graders not graduating at 21%.¹⁵ Each measure has merit as a distinct way to analyze the phenomenon, but the DOE figure of 32% accounts for *all BPS students who drop out*.

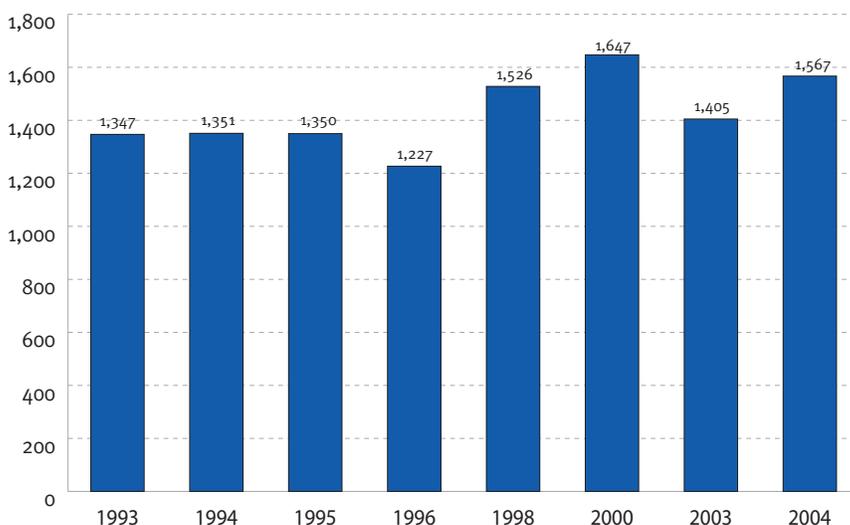
More than 1,400 students drop out each year

Regardless of the disparities in the data, there is no argument that in any given year, over the past five years, 1,400 to 1,600 students are dropping out of school in Boston as shown in the chart to the left. This compares with the approximately 3,000 students who graduate each year.

Half of those who begin 9th grade in the BPS graduate from the BPS

The Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) calculates a BPS graduation rate of 51% for the class of 2003: just over half of those who began in a BPS 9th grade class finished four years later as BPS graduates. This finding highlights the profound impact of student mobility – especially including stu-

Number of Students Dropping Out from Boston Public Schools Annually: Selected Years from 1993–2004 (DOE)



dent departures out of the school system and sometimes out of the country – on BPS enrollment and graduation rates.¹⁶

8,000 dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 live in Boston

8,000 of Boston’s 16-24 year olds were out of school with neither a diploma nor a GED in 2000. This group represents about 8% of the total population in that age cohort, but when the data is adjusted to exclude non-resident college students and in-migrating dropouts, closer to 12% of “Boston’s native” young adults were dropouts.¹⁷

Dropouts are Disproportionately African American and Latino, Low Income and Male

Youth of color and low-income youth are more likely to drop out more often

African American and Latino youth bear the brunt of the dropout crisis. In the 2000 Census, Latino youth represented 45% of all high school dropouts living in Boston, and African American youth accounted for another 25%. Together, these two groups of young people comprised 70% of all dropouts living in the city.¹⁸

Latino and Black students in Boston have consistently higher dropout rates than White and Asian students. Black students recently passed Latino students in the dropout rate. The increase in the Black dropout rate, highest among Black males than any group, may be a key factor in the overall increase in the BPS dropout rate over the last three years.¹⁹

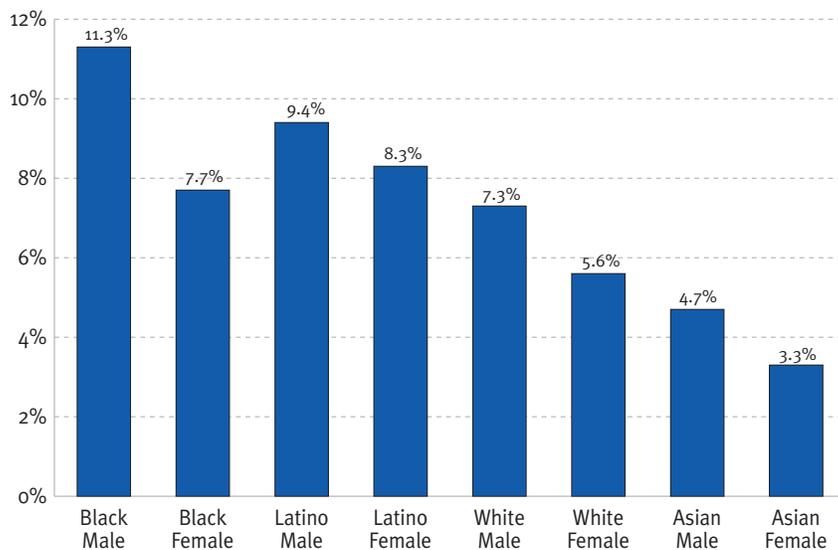
Most, but not all, of Boston’s dropouts are members of low-income families. In 1999, more than half (55%) of young dropouts were members of families earning 200% of the US poverty level, or less. Nearly a third (31%) were living at or below the poverty level, which defined poverty as having an annual income for a family of four of \$16,700.²⁰

Males are 30% more likely to dropout than females

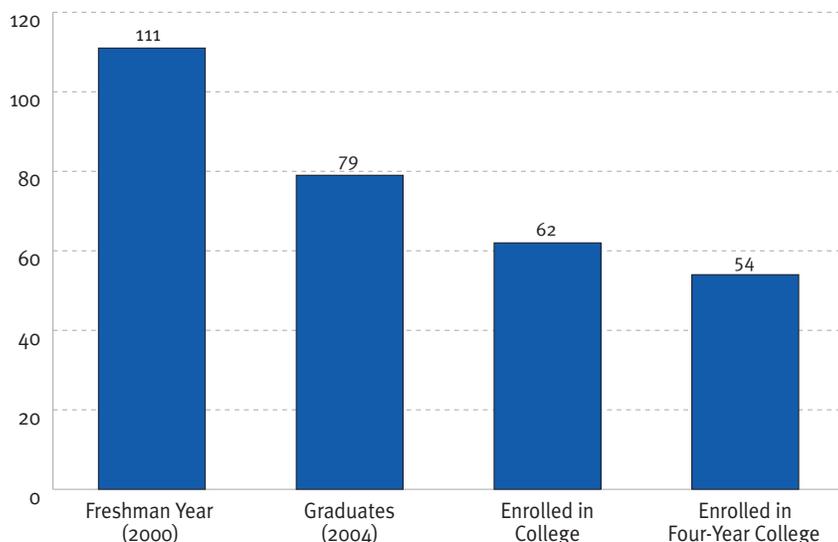
In Boston, male students have a much harder time academically than female students.

Compared to their female counterparts, males lag behind in every measure of academic attainment and are more likely to drop out. Male BPS graduates are less likely to go on to college. Once in college, they are less likely to complete college. The chart below compares the number of males per hundred females at important transition points. Males opt out of school at each transition point: ultimately, half as many men as women enter a four-year college.²¹

Boston Annual Dropout Rate by Race-Ethnic Group and Gender, SY 2003–2004 (BPS)



Numbers of Males per 100 Females as 9th Graders (2000), as BPS Graduates (2004), as College Enrollees, and as Four-Year College Enrollees





Dropouts face a competitive, even hostile labor market environment. Boston ranks 44th out of the 50 largest central cities nationally in the employment rate of dropouts age 16-19.

Academically challenged students are more likely to drop out

Students who are English Language Learners and students who are enrolled in special education programs are more likely to drop out. BPS students in bilingual education and special education students are 20% and 25% more likely to drop out than regular education students.²²

Students who fail the MCAS are more likely to drop out. However, passing the MCAS is not a guarantee against dropping out. Across the state, almost half of all juniors (45%) and nearly two thirds of seniors (65%) who dropped out in Massachusetts during the 2003–2004 school year had *already passed the MCAS*.²³

Students who are held back or retained are three to four times more likely to drop out than their peers who are promoted to the next grade. A BPS study found that in 2002–2003, 22% of tenth graders who had been retained in grade nine dropped out that year. This number climbed to 33% for those who were retained in grade 10.²⁴

Some students who drop out face major life challenges apart from school

Students who drop out often face serious non-academic problems in their lives. In many cases, public or private systems of care beyond the BPS become involved. These additional systems of care, education, intervention, or support are run by city and state agencies and by community and non-profit sector organizations.

Many incarcerated youth have dropped out of school, and virtually all are at high risk of dropping out. The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) works with approximately 1,500 juvenile offenders from Boston each year. **Of the 500 Boston youth committed by the juvenile justice system to DYS in 2005, half were enrolled in Boston public high schools.** Of these BPS-DYS students, 61% have identified special education needs.²⁵ According to national

findings, **adjudicated youth are more likely to drop out. One study found that among incarcerated 9th graders, only 15% completed high school.**²⁶

In 2005, **there were 723 Boston youth in foster care between the ages of 12 and 17.**²⁷

Served by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS), most of these youth have survived abuse and neglect, and are coping with serious mental health, educational and development challenges that threaten their success in school. Many have already dropped out. National studies of foster children find that as many as 55% drop out of high school.²⁸

Pregnant and parenting young women are another group at risk for dropping out. In 2000, there were 4,427 mothers in Boston between the ages of 16 and 24; 23% of them, or 1,000, were dropouts.²⁹ Of the most economically disadvantaged young mothers – those receiving transitional assistance – 41% have dropped out of school.³⁰

The Consequences of Dropping Out are Dire and Lasting

Dropouts face a competitive, even hostile labor market environment. Boston is a city with a highly educated workforce and a concentration of jobs that require advanced post-secondary or technical training. Boston ranks 44th out of the 50 largest central cities nationally in the employment rate of dropouts age 16-19.³¹

Dropouts experience more poverty, for longer

Dropouts will earn almost \$2 million less over a lifetime than those who obtain a Bachelors Degree. BPS dropouts face nearly 20 years of low-income status, as compared with five years for those who earn a college degree.³²

Black youth pay a high price for dropping out

Black dropouts earn significantly less annually than all other group. On average, employed Asian, Latino and White 16-24

year old dropouts earned \$14,216 in 1999; Black dropouts earned \$9,687, or 32% less.

Black male dropouts are four times as likely as other male dropouts to be institutionalized, frequently in the custody of DYS, or in prison.³⁴

Dropping Out is a Gradual Process

Many BPS students struggle in school for years before they drop out

For a variety of reasons, many middle and high school students are struggling in school, and are at serious risk of dropping out. Accurate counts of such students are not readily available, but students who drop out report they experience significant academic, social and/or emotional difficulty, often several years prior to their departure from school.

Problems driving students to drop out often can unfold over a period of years. Students who are held back a grade in middle school or high school, English Language Learners, immigrants, special education students with learning disabilities and students who struggle with the MCAS may attempt to resolve their learning or social problems during multiple years of schooling, in an unsuccessful attempt to stay in school.

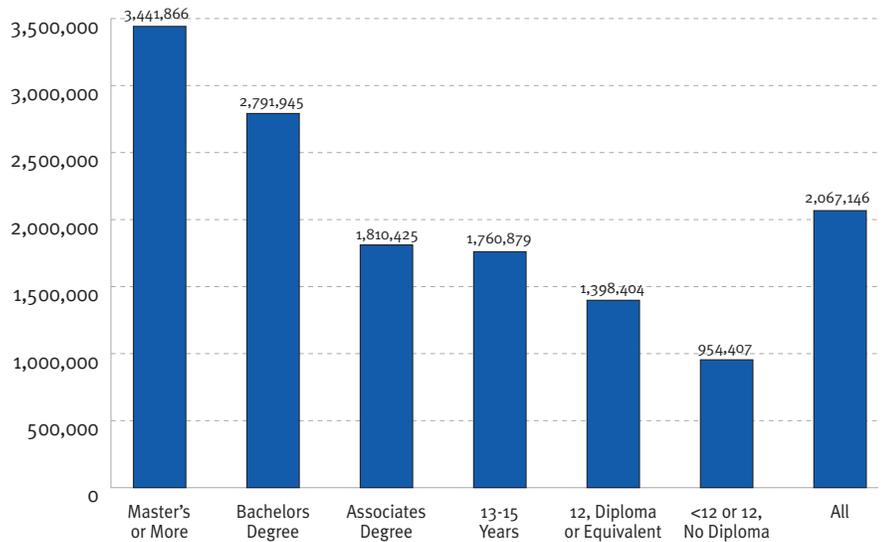
Before they drop out, students are frequently absent

Students with poor attendance are much more likely to drop out. Statewide, dropouts missed an average of 31 days in their last year of school, while non-dropouts missed an average of 10 days. In Boston, dropouts only had a 59% attendance record in the year prior to leaving school, while non-dropouts had an average of 88%.³⁶

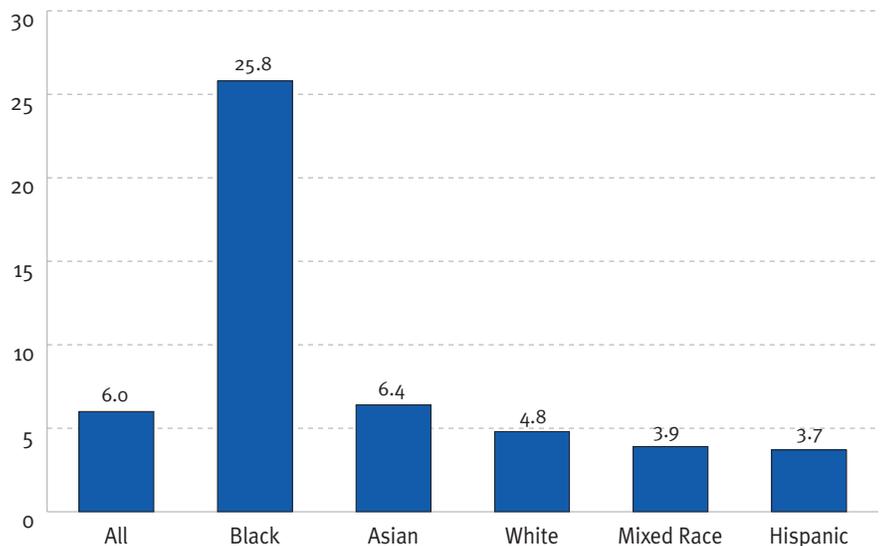
Transferring to a new school increases the dropout risk

Students who change schools are at greater risk to drop out. The overall flow of students into and out of schools is referred to as the mobility rate. The mobility rate for BPS high schools was 21.7% in 2003-2004.³⁷ Black

Lifetime Earnings of 18-65 Year Old Men by Educational Attainment in Massachusetts, 2000 (18-22 Year Olds Enrolled in School Excluded)³³



Percent of 16-24 Year Old Male High School Dropouts in Massachusetts Who Were Institutionalized at the Time of the 2000 Census, Total and by Race-Ethnic Group³⁵



and Latino students had the highest rate of transfers. The highest number by far were among Black students. These are significant findings because students who change school are less likely to pass the MCAS: 65.4% of all transferring students passed the MCAS, compared with 81.2% of non-transferring students. Transferring students are also less likely to achieve proficient or advanced scores on the MCAS – 23.8% compared with 39.2%.³⁸



Not All Disconnected Youth are Dropouts

4,000 BPS graduates are out of school, out of work and disconnected

Not all BPS graduates thrive in the Boston economy. Some 4,000 BPS graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 are not engaged with training, school or the job market.³⁹ This “disconnected” cohort of young adults, when added with the 8,000 dropouts in their age cohort, forms a core of 12,000 in the city of Boston with an acutely limited ability to contribute to the local economy, to sustain themselves economically, to support families, or to help build communities. It is a group whose future economic prospects are grim.

The knowledge-based economy also penalizes some high school graduates

Entering the job market is a difficult transition, even for a BPS graduate. According to the Massachusetts Division of Career Services (DCS), by 2008, 65% of new jobs in Boston will require an Associate’s Degree or

higher. The recent economic downturn and jobless recovery have compounded the problem by making even low-wage, low-skill jobs scarce. The national rate for teen employment, measured as the percentage of the total population that is working, was 36.8% in 2003, down from 45.2% in 2000, and has not risen significantly since.⁴⁰

The consequences for dropouts and for graduates who are out of school and out of work become more pronounced the longer they remain unemployed. Protracted periods of high youth unemployment pose a problem because youth employment is not just an outcome – it is also a factor in future employment prospects. Lack of employment in young adulthood and inconsistent low-wage employment predict lower earnings up to 8-10 years after leaving school.⁴¹

Young adults fall into the gaps between adult and youth service systems

Government-mandated performance standards discourage schools and youth alternative education programs from admitting older youth with particularly low academic skills. Young adults over 18 years of age are technically eligible for adult training programs. However, in 2004, 18-24 year olds filled only 14% of 320 seats in federally funded adult occupational training programs.

School Leaders Making Changes: One Approach

This year, in response to a Youth Transitions-sponsored presentation of new data from the BPS and the CLMS, a subcommittee of the High School Headmasters Association began work on a new approach to collecting dropout data. Equipped with new data on the scale of the problem, and mindful of their central role in generating and using this data, these headmasters sought to make some changes.

This development holds promise. Incomplete and untimely data is an impediment to the efforts of everyone working with disconnected or struggling youth. Schools have limited resources for data collection, and strong disincentives to cultivate better data collection practices. As a result, it is extremely important that any effort to improve data collection be crafted with the realities and challenges of the urban high school foremost in mind.

Unlike many reform ventures, this process is being driven by those it will most affect – headmasters. No one is in a better position to understand the practical challenges of accurately collecting this data than the leaders of BPS high schools. No one could have greater credibility with other headmasters in suggesting or advocating alternatives to current practice.

Conceived and executed by headmasters and supported by BPS central offices such as Records Management, Student Assignment and Research, Assessment and Evaluation, as well as the PIC and the CLMS, the approach that emerges from this work is nearly certain to be guided by the needs of school leaders, who are more likely to put it to use.

In short, this is a good way to make change happen.

Next Steps

In year two, the Youth Transitions Task Force will strive to:

- Refine data collection methods
- Continue research on the characteristics of students who drop out
- Develop consensus on reporting and measurement protocols
- Pilot innovations that allow for more data sharing
- Use data to intervene with students in “real time”

WHAT YOUTH AND ADULTS TELL US

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Perspectives: Youth, Parents, Teachers and Youth Service Providers

Much of the Youth Transitions Task Force qualitative research over the past year has focused on the perspectives and experiences of young people and the adults in their lives. With leadership from several agencies, Youth Transitions partners gathered insights from youth, parents, teachers and youth service providers.

Four organizations conducted the research on youth: Emerging Leaders, a leadership development program at the University of Massachusetts–Boston; the Boston Youth Service Network (BYSN), a consortium of community-based organizations offering alternative education and career exploration opportunities; the Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp), a statewide organization promoting collaboration and policy innovation in youth development and education; and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), which facilitates much of the youth employment and workforce development activity in the city.⁴²

The Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) conducted focus groups with 50 parents of Boston Public Schools (BPS) students and former students.⁴³ These parents were largely from African American and Latino backgrounds, as were the youth. This is consistent with the make-up of the BPS. Focus groups were conducted in three languages (English, Spanish, and Cape Verdean Creole).

Research on teacher perspectives took place as part of the BPS High School Renewal effort. The Teacher Advisory Committee facilitated a survey and focus group discussions. A total of 353 teachers from 16 high schools responded to the survey. A focus group of teachers responded specifically to Youth Transitions questions about why students become disconnected.

Partners conducted two more focus groups – one of 14 youth education and training providers and another of 26 adult literacy and ESOL providers. Finally, to round out all perspectives, staff interviewed five state agency representatives, five BPS leaders, City youth department leaders and over 20 youth service providers.

The Youth Perspective

Relationships with adults are the most important factor in a student’s school experience

Across the board, adults and youth alike stressed the pivotal role of relationships in the lives of young people. In their view, the essential ingredients of successful student engagement and achievement are positive, consistent, and long-term ties with family, peers, other caring adults and effective external support programs.

Youth need a connection with caring adults to succeed in an educational program.

Students reported that caring teachers are essential to their sense of connection to school. **There is a virtually universal need to be known and understood by adults. “You come to school for one teacher or those few teachers that understand you and try to help you out.”**

Poor relationships with teachers and impersonal learning environments lead to disconnection, and many youth report a sense of invisibility. “...*Teachers weren’t teaching and teachers don’t care. You could just walk right out of the classroom.*”

Schools often feel unsafe

Peers at high school can create an unsafe or chaotic environment. This situation seriously interferes with learning and can cause youth to leave high school. Peers who disrupted

Youth need a connection with caring adults to succeed in an educational program. Students reported that caring teachers are essential to their sense of connection to school.

Young people like alternative education programs because they are small, enable students to get personal attention from teachers, and allow them to “work at their own pace.”

class and engaged in violence frustrated students. *“The other kids in the class would be fighting and the teachers did not care and did nothing.”*

Lack of an academic “fit” can disrupt learning

Youth cited the pace of instruction – not feeling challenged, falling behind, or not being on track to graduate – as important reasons for leaving school. Some students were frustrated by too slow a pace, while others were frustrated by the feeling of being so far behind they could not catch up.

Personal problems or issues cause youth to leave school

Youth acknowledged their own responsibility in dropping out of school. Many students cited personal problems as reasons for leaving school, including family responsibilities, having a child and trouble with peers.

Alternative schools can resolve some problems

Young people like alternative education programs because they are small, which enables them to get personal attention from teachers and “work at their own pace.” *“Teachers are very supportive and make you feel like someone.”*

The Parent Perspective

Parents want better communication with the school staff

Parents indicated that they want to hear from the schools if their child is struggling. Parents who do not speak English need school communications to be in their native language. *“There should be more communication between parents and teachers and more counselors in the schools.”* *“We never learned that they were having difficulties until we approached the end of the year.”*

Parents want a school climate that is welcoming and respectful

Many parents felt schools did not respect them. Some felt the schools saw them – or the issues of their children – as bothersome. Of those parents who mentioned they sought

support for their child from school, not one noted a positive or welcoming response from the schools. One parent felt *“pushed under the rug,”* when talking to school staff about her child’s problems. Another was told, *“Once your son turns 16, he is not required to go to school.”*

Parents want more support of students’ individual needs

Parents felt that if school staff were more aware of the daily life and individual emotional challenges facing students, they would be more supportive, and students would feel less alienated. Parents stressed issues such as low self-esteem, body image, lack of motivation, negative peer influences and lack of career guidance.

Parents cited a scarcity of resources for students and teachers. Parents are often unaware of resources that *do* exist. Parents want smaller classrooms, more books and supplies, more electives and increased teacher ability to work with struggling students.

Immigrant parents and parents of special education students felt particularly frustrated about their relationships with the schools. Parents recounted negative experiences with the BPS in their efforts to advocate for their struggling children in school.

The Teacher Perspective

Teachers corroborated the importance of the teacher-student relationship

89% of teachers surveyed believe that most teachers in their school are committed to developing strong relationships with students. *“Teachers need to see students as people, treat them with respect, and know what’s going on in their lives.”*

Teachers feel that students’ dropping out is beyond their control

Over two-thirds of respondents feel that student success or failure is beyond their control. Almost two-thirds disagree that keeping students from dropping out of school is the responsibility of teachers.



Many teachers feel that social and emotional problems are important factors in students' decisions to drop out, and they often feel powerless to affect them. Many felt that middle schools socially promote unprepared eighth graders and that high schools are ill equipped to make up for lost time.

Teachers feel limited power to change or tailor instruction

Teachers report feeling mixed that they combine high expectations of students with individualized attention, yet they do not feel they can alter the pace of instruction to accommodate the needs of individual students. *“All the pressure of the pacing guides forces us to leave the emotional/social piece out.”*

Teachers feel mixed in their ability to teach English Language Learners and special education students in the inclusion classroom model. *“Some students need more than one year to learn English. It’s disastrous. We will lose a lot of kids because they don’t have the support.”*

The Youth Service Provider Perspective

Youth are often overwhelmed

Urban youth face daunting challenges. Those who seek services often do not trust adults because of prior negative life experiences. Experiences with violence and the obvious injuries of poverty burden young people trying to change their lives. Serious personal problems are often exacerbated by poor coping skills, and many get overwhelmed. *“Their problem-solving processes are weak to begin with, so when they get into crisis, their thought process leads them into more trouble.” “I don’t think it’s a lack of motivation so much as a real sense of hopelessness. They have to survive huge systems with little power or control over circumstances.”*

Demand for programs greatly exceeds program supply

Many providers experienced a demand for services that exceeded their capacity. *“For our employment program, we had the highest number of applicants this year since 1996, yet we have fewer jobs than ever.” “Last year we had 50 applicants and 18 slots.”*

Weak academic skills cripple recovery efforts

One of the greatest challenges is to serve young people possessing very low academic skill levels, often in combination with other barriers. Some providers set minimum skill requirements for sixth or eighth grade reading and math levels. Diploma programs, in particular, set these requirements to ensure that the student can actually benefit from the services offered. One provider said: *“75% of the kids that walk in the door test below the floor.”*

Economic pressures on youth are great

Youth employment opportunities are few; and youth employment programming and support are insufficient to meet demand. *“When the training is too long-term, you lose them, unless you pay them. They start to want to get a pay-check, so they take the first thing that comes along, and then stop coming.”*

Next Steps

In year two, the Youth Transitions Task Force will strive to:

- **Gather the stories of actual struggling students and dropouts**
- **Share these first-hand accounts of youths’ experiences widely**
- **Pilot enhanced student and family support models, and expand proven approaches**
- **Use community partners to provide support services for youth and families**
- **Improve communications between schools and parents**

MAPPING SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

UNDERSTANDING BOSTON'S SERVICES FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS AND DROPOUTS

There is no organization that “owns” dropouts as a group, so while there are pockets of promising dropout prevention and recovery practices, programs and initiatives are not woven into an effective system.

The Youth Transitions Task Force conducted a systems analysis to understand the assets and gaps in Boston’s education and youth service system. Key findings included:

Programs vary greatly: Boston offers a number of varied opportunities for struggling students and dropouts.

Demand outpaces supply: Currently, schools and programs lack the capacity to reduce the scale of the dropout problem.

Coordination is not a strength: There is no organization that “owns” dropouts as a group, so while there are pockets of promising dropout prevention and recovery practices, programs and initiatives are not woven into an effective system.

Outreach to dropouts is virtually non-existent: Few programs – and no systems – consistently reach out to dropouts and their parents, though there are outreach initiatives that target youth with other risk factors.

Programs Vary Greatly

Boston offers many programs for struggling students and dropouts

Boston has created a diverse set of programs and schools that includes:

1. A primary layer of schooling, providing **dropout prevention**:
 - BPS district and pilot high schools
 - BPS alternative education programs
2. A “second-chance” layer of schools and programs, offering **dropout recovery**:
 - Community-based alternative programs
 - Adult education programs
 - Workforce development systems for youth and young adults

3. Other outreach and support programs for youth with particular social risk factors:

- The educational and support programs of the state Departments of Youth Services (DYS), Social Services (DSS) and Transitional Assistance (DTA)
- City and community-based outreach and support programs

Boston public district and pilot high schools

Over 78% of Boston’s public high school students attend recently created small high schools, or larger schools which have recently been divided into small learning communities. Many of these new schools have themes or career pathways, such as environmental science or social justice (for a complete list of Boston public high schools, see Appendix C). In the past decade the district has launched 10 pilot high schools and plans to open more. Pilot schools have budgeting and hiring independence and management flexibility: a recent study suggests that pilot schools are effective in retaining and graduating students.⁴⁴

In each high school, dropout prevention includes:

Student Support: Guidance counselors and coordinators work with teams of school staff and community agencies to address the needs of individual students. Some high schools have piloted the use of teacher advisories, where teachers provide ongoing social and emotional support to small groups of students. Other high schools partner with community-based organizations to provide dropout prevention services or programs to increase student engagement.



Dropouts need more than one path to reconnect. Many are frustrated with school, but are eager to engage with work or training.

Standards and Academic Support: Since 2001, when Massachusetts began administering the MCAS as a graduation requirement, the district instituted a number of supports in smaller schools, including double blocks of English and math, after-school tutoring, and test preparation offered by external partners.

Alternative schools in the BPS and the community: the “Second-Chance System”

The BPS has an emerging portfolio of alternative educational programs for students who are not succeeding in district or pilot schools. This system includes six alternative schools run by the BPS. The BPS also contracts with nine community-based organizations to provide short-term alternative settings or alternative diploma programs.

The alternative schools range in size from a few dozens students to several hundred, with a total of approximately 1,400 seats. They serve pregnant teens and young parents, adjudicated youth after incarceration, and new arrivals from other countries. These programs often feature alternative instruction and support strategies.

“Our goal in alternative education is to create a first-class, second-chance educational system for youth who have struggled in other schools,” said one local education leader.

Community-based alternative programs for dropout recovery

Programs to help dropouts reclaim a course toward education and employment come in a variety of forms. A group of community-based programs formed the Boston Youth Service Network. They provide options such as GED preparation and career exploration programs. For example, YouthBuild offers hands-on experience in home building and GED instruction for youth who have left school.

There are approximately 11 programs operated by public and non-profit agencies in Boston, offering seats to approximately 400 youth. The Mayor’s Office of Jobs and Community Services (JCS) supports and

monitors most of these programs through funding from the Workforce Investment Act (U.S. Department of Labor) and other City sources.

Adult education programs for dropout recovery

Some young adults who have dropped out find their way into literacy or English language instruction programs that are offered to adults and immigrants. The adult education system includes over 25 community-based organizations, many of them long-standing service providers. These programs fall into three categories: low literacy instruction, GED preparation, and English for speakers of other languages. About 800 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 access these programs.

Workforce development programs for youth and young adults

Dropouts need more than one path to reconnect. Many are frustrated with school, but are eager to engage with work or training. Structured training or employment programs engage youth in positive activity and can convince young adults to reconsider education as a means of advancing their careers.

There are 800 seats for youth and young adults in programs that provide hands-on instruction or training in job skills. Some of these are prevention strategies that use career information to convince youth to stay in school, such as Sociedad Latina’s Health Careers program, which provides internships, training and career exposure. Others are recovery strategies that give dropouts

Classroom at the Workplace

Classroom at the Workplace, organized by the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and funded by the state Department of Education, combines academic remediation and work for students who have yet to pass the math or English portions of the MCAS. Major employers provide students with 90 minutes a day to attend class -- at the workplace, during the work day. Annually, the program serves 200 high school students and out-of-school youth. Since 2003, over 70% of participants have passed both the math and English portions of the MCAS tests and completed the graduation requirement; 92% have passed at least one retest.

“It was really different than anything I had experienced. It made me feel like I made a step up in life. Man, being placed in that setting changed my life. I learned a lot of things I had no idea about.”

—Curvin Dixon, Graduate, “Let’s Maintain” Program, 2005

Let’s Maintain: Piloting Skills Training for Young Men

In 2004, at the urging of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, the Workforce Investment Board of Boston set aside \$210,000 in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to solicit group training and employment services for young adults ages 18-24, with an emphasis on young men with multiple barriers to employment. The Mayor’s Office of Jobs and Community Services (JCS) funded Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), in partnership with Wentworth Institute of Technology, to run a 21-week Facilities Maintenance program. The program features several promising practices, and highlights the barriers to re-connecting out-of-school/out-of-work youth.

Promising practices

- **Engaging Young Men in Learning:** 30 financially eligible young men applied for the program, and 11 of the 12 enrollees completed the 22-week program. For virtually all of the enrollees, this was the first college experience of their lives.
- **Meeting Employment Aspirations:** The program cycle was long enough to provide meaningful training, but short enough to retain those eager to get to work.
- **Diverse Learning Approaches:** The program used hands-on training, reading and math remediation, an internship, and a college seminar in blueprint reading.
- **Building Skills:** The hands-on training in carpentry, electricity, plumbing and repairs gave participants concrete skills before they entered the workplace.
- **Offering Recognition and Respect:** Wentworth’s president and the Director of the JCS attended the graduation, and the *Boston Herald* covered the event.
- **Stimulating Ongoing Investment:** On the strength of the pilot’s performance, the City agreed to fund a second class of young men with JCS funding.

Barriers

- Many applicants face academic barriers, making training difficult to design
- Graduates are not guaranteed jobs.
- Program funding, although renewed once, is soft.
- Formal evaluation and viability of a scaled-up approach are not established.

and disengaged graduates a concrete employment-based path back into the mainstream, such as Action for Boston Community Development’s Let’s Maintain program (see box at left).

Transitional employment places youth in competitive jobs through a step-by-step process starting with subsidized wages and highly supervised work experiences. Two years ago there were about 650 seats in such programs in Boston; now, because of cuts in US Department of Labor funding to Youth Opportunity (YO), there are closer to 350.

Demand Outpaces Supply

Current schools and programs lack the capacity to serve all youth effectively

There is an enormous gap between the number of dropouts and struggling students and the number of program and alternative school seats available to them. While it is impossible to be precise, it appears that existing programs are meeting roughly a quarter of the identified need.

- 18,870 students attend Boston public high schools. There are – at most – 1,400 seats available in BPS alternative education for struggling students and near dropouts.
- At least 8,000 dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 live in Boston, but only 1,200 seats exist in youth GED or adult education programs.

Coordination is Not a Strength

No organization or agency “owns” dropouts, so there is no leadership to integrate existing services and plan for more

Coordination across systems is weak, with serious consequences for youth and young adults. For instance, there is no central catalog or clearinghouse to connect struggling students or dropouts with the full array of options. Youth who find their way to programs often do so by chance or through word of mouth. Although each system has tried to catalog its own options, referrals depend on what individual counselors know

of the options, or what students learn from friends or relatives. Youth, parents, educators and teachers all indicate that they are unaware of options available to struggling students and dropouts.

The lack of coordination between programs stems from multiple factors:

Separate bureaucracies, leadership and missions: Boston public high schools and the alternative programs have different oversight and organizational support mechanisms. The BPS and the alternative youth programs are managed by different city departments.

Though service to youth is a shared value, the pathways to youth success vary greatly, and each program or system tends to focus on its own pathways.

Different funding streams and accountability benchmarks create different cultures: Many people working on behalf of struggling students and dropouts are focused on very different outcomes. The BPS values course requirements and the MCAS as the standards for graduation. Teachers in alternative programs value the GED certificate and workforce connections as a step toward recovery. Education programs funded by Workforce Investment Act and adult education funds are accountable for a different set of standards than the public schools.

Competition for funding: In a world of scarce funding for education and youth, it is inevitable that community-based programs and Boston district schools must compete for funds and students.

Outreach to Dropouts is Virtually Non-existent

Few programs consistently reach out to dropouts and their parents

Once a student has left the BPS – and often before then – programs and schools have limited capacity for maintaining contact with individual students and older youth. Students can fall out of the BPS or other systems, frequently without being noticed or supported. Outreach workers are critical to bridge the

gap between youth and programs and between the service systems outlined above. One critical lesson learned is that reaching out to dropouts is hard. It takes vigorous efforts over time to engage young people who are both disconnected and discouraged.

While there are several outreach efforts in Boston that serve subgroups of youth at-risk, no one organization is charged with overseeing a system to serve all dropouts.

Boston Public Schools. The BPS has attendance officers that follow up with families of truant students. If families are unresponsive, those who are under 16 can be referred to court and social services or probation under the CHINS Act (Child in Need of Services). Because state law allows students to drop out at 16, school districts have no legal authority to intervene with truants over 16. Annually, BPS Unified Student Services staff reach out by telephone to about 1,000 dropouts to try to convince them to enroll in school or alternative education programs. Reaching about half of those they call, counselors provide information about reenrollment and alternative education options. Existing resources do not allow for more intensive follow-up.

Youth Opportunity Boston (YO). YO provides adjudicated youth with outreach and case-management, and specializes in support for youth reentering the community from youth detention, jail, and prison. It served about 1,200 youth annually at the height of its grant funding. YO was mentioned as a trusted resource more than any other provider in the Black Ministerial Alliance's Needs Assessment of High-Risk Youth. The end of a U.S. Department of Labor five-year grant threatens these much-needed services.

Once a student is out of the BPS – and often before then – programs and schools have few available tools for maintaining contact with individual students and older youth. Students can fall out of the BPS or other systems, frequently without being noticed or supported.

The Mayor’s StreetWorkers. Through the Boston Centers for Youth and Families, the **StreetWorkers program reaches out to disconnected youth, targeting those affected by gangs and violence.** The StreetWorkers provide referrals to health care, jobs training, clinical services, and educational and employment programs. Twenty StreetWorkers make over 3,000 resource referrals in a year, mostly young men. They each work intensively with about 300 youth.

Boston Urban Youth Foundation (BUYF). The Boston Urban Youth Foundation provides outreach and support for truants in several middle schools, acting on the analysis that students who drop out in high school are often those who get lost in middle school.

MCAS Pathway Counselors. Through Boston’s One-Stop Career Centers, three counselors provide outreach and referrals to young adults who do not have a high school credential because they did not pass the MCAS. The counselors make referrals to employment, but emphasize convincing youth to continue their education. Partnering with Bunker Hill and Roxbury Community Colleges, they refer young people to MCAS preparation courses offered on those campuses.

Innovation: A Case Study The Success Initiative

In the past two years, the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) and the Boston Public Schools (BPS), with support from the Commonwealth Corporation and Youth Opportunity (YO), have crafted a pioneering alignment of their programming and data. These two agencies have found a way to communicate using a similar pool of data on students/clients. This model, though still young, warrants special notice because it breaks the “silo” tradition, achieves better outcomes, models new practices, and confronts the long-standing dilemma of sustainability.

Among the achievements of the DYS/BPS partnership:

- Establishment of a model for youth to successfully transition back into school from DYS, a process that often fails, leading to dropping out, re-institutionalization, or both.
- Introduction of “pre-release planning” for re-entry students, so that they have worked for several months with a team of professionals to jointly devise clear expectations, goals and a plan of action.
- Specialized case-management services through YO that begin with pre-release planning and follow the students through school transitions.
- New BPS policies supporting school assignment of students to schools that can provide the counseling, special education and other supports that students require.
- A new tracking, evaluation and transition support system within BPS for all transitioning youth in the program. This key innovation allows all parties to track the passage of youth through the system, and prevents the “loss” of students as they make their way through the system. It is especially important and rare, as few agencies share student/client data in a systemic, coordinated partnership to achieve better outcomes.
- A model for adoption by others.

Some Struggling Students and Dropouts are Served by State Agencies

Separate state systems of care administer support services and care to youth whose behavior or family status place their emotional and physical health at extreme risk. The Massachusetts Departments of Youth Services, Social Services and Transitional Assistance help young people and their families to negotiate the educational systems outlined above.

DYS, DSS and DTA youth often have interruptions in their education. These agencies each attempt to address the educational development of youth in their care, but often founder in their attempts to coordinate with local school systems. Each agency has a unique approach and relationship with schools and programs, and each has a plan to improve the educational outcomes for its youth.

Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS)

Juveniles arrested for sufficiently serious offenses are placed in pre-trial detention. If the offense is grave enough or repeated, youth are committed to the DYS and are often in care of the agency until they are 18, or even 21. Because youth in pre-trial detention remain for short periods, DYS does not have the same control over planning for these youth that it does over the committed youth. This does not allow for consistent follow-up.

In light of the high dropout rate for adjudicated youth, the DYS has improved its educational services. DYS is investing \$21 million over the five years to improve its internal education services for committed youth, and to increase the educational success of youth transitioning back into the community. In Boston, this work has led to the creation of “The Success Initiative,” a groundbreaking partnership between the BPS, DYS, YO and the Commonwealth Corporation, to enable DYS-committed youth to reenter the public schools (see box on page 18).

Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS)

DSS is the state agency responsible for the care of abused, neglected, orphaned or otherwise traumatized children and youth, and works extensively with families to support their healthy development. In the Boston region there are 3,200 families with open cases. 723 youth aged 12-18 are committed to DSS. 136 of those in residential care attend private, residential schools; the others, it is presumed, attend public schools. Youth in foster care have a high dropout rate.⁴⁵ Many DSS youth do not fit into a traditional classroom because they often need more supports and smaller settings to succeed.

In addition to the supports mentioned above, DSS contracts with Communities for People for educational consulting services. Each area office has a consultant who works with schools to make sure that the educational

Next Steps

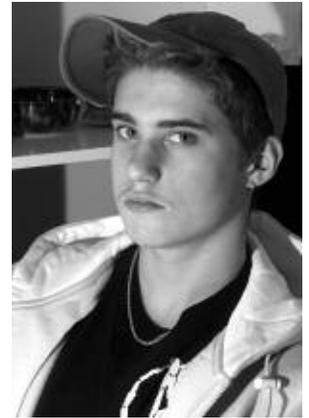
In year two, the Youth Transitions Task Force will strive to:

- Increase the number of quality alternative education and training options for struggling students and dropouts
- Convene a multi-agency alternative education planning group and charge a PS leader with its coordination
- Develop a shared definition of educational programs and benchmarks
- Promote and expand Boston’s promising practices
- Develop a clearinghouse of information on options for dropouts

needs of DSS youth are met. The challenge for the consultants is the sheer volume of schools, in addition to staff and school policies to negotiate. The DSS would like to work with the BPS to better organize educational connections.

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)

The DTA is a significant provider of support services for pregnant and parenting young women who are single and low-income. As of April 2005, the DTA was providing 2,127 young mothers aged 16-24 with assistance, 41% of whom were dropouts. The DTA services include access to education and vocational training, financial support, food stamps, transportation funds and day care vouchers. The DTA has a long track record of supporting its younger clients to complete high school or obtain a GED. Young women under 18 must document attendance in a high school or GED program in order to receive benefits. Other service providers report that this DTA policy is effective in minimizing the dropout rate for this group.



YOUTH TRANSITIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

The BPS and Youth Transitions partners should devise ways to use the early information on withdrawals from school and chronic absenteeism during the course of the year to intervene with students before they are lost.

From the outset of the initiative, the Youth Transitions Task Force embraced the challenge of crafting recommendations that will (1) increase the number of high school dropouts who return to education and training and (2) decrease the number of students who leave the system without a diploma.

The following six recommendations, and the various objectives within them, pursue the dual mission of dropout recovery and dropout prevention. They are informed by the data analysis, the focus groups and the system analysis presented in the previous sections of this report. They reflect discussions held over fourteen fully attended meetings conducted over fourteen months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Refine dropout data collection methods and deepen the analysis of the crisis
2. Develop early intervention strategies for struggling students and an outreach and referral system for dropouts
3. Increase the number and variety of alternative education and training opportunities
4. Create school climates that are welcoming and respectful for students and parents
5. Increase coordination among schools, alternative programs and city agencies to close gaps in the second chance system
6. Develop revenue strategies to support alternative programs, early intervention and outreach to dropouts

Recommendation #1:

Improve the accuracy of dropout data collection and deepen the analysis of the crisis

Reach consensus on reporting methods

Headmasters are redesigning dropout data collection methods in their schools. Boston school officials and Youth Transitions partners should support their efforts. (See sidebar, page 10.) The Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) is designing a new method for reporting graduation rates, adopting an approach endorsed by the National Governors Association.

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the DOE must work together to achieve a shared understanding of the new method and its consequences for schools and school districts, as well as its impact on dropout prevention and recovery efforts.

Promote data sharing to track students and document outcomes

The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) and the BPS have piloted this work in the Success Initiative (see sidebar, page 18), a model for BPS-public care agency collaboration. To better track students, the school department should develop agreements with community organizations and public agencies that allow for sharing relevant information.

Boston will benefit if programs are able to share data on the large cohort of youth that they collectively serve. A shared, web-based data system would allow program staff to report on the characteristics of the youth they serve, as well as on life outcomes. The Boston Youth Services Network (BYSN), a group of community-based youth service organizations, is exploring the feasibility of implementing a system like this. This would be

particularly useful if the Network and the BPS could share data about students and dropouts.

Research the characteristics and experiences of students who have dropped out and share their stories with policy makers and the public

Leaders must get to know the many profiles of the dropout crisis, as well as the scale of the issue, to find out what has happened to these young people, and to learn about their hopes and challenges.

Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) staff will study the academic status of BPS dropouts, using data on grades, credits earned and MCAS scores, paying special attention to English Language Learners and students in special education. The Private Industry Council (PIC) will dedicate staff time to reach out to dropouts, document their experiences, and share their stories widely. The Youth Transitions Task Force will work with the BPS and other agencies to understand what these young people need to re-enter the education system and to join the workforce.

Recommendation #2:

Develop early intervention strategies for struggling students and an outreach and referral system for dropouts

Use data to identify struggling students and intervene before they drop out

The process of dropping out begins in middle school, if not earlier. The BPS Office of High School Renewal is piloting the use of data on struggling students as they move from middle school to high school. Risk indicators include excessive absences, grade retention and multiple school transfers. This approach should be expanded so that intervention begins in middle school.

Boston currently produces dropout information annually for reporting purposes. The BPS and Youth Transitions partners should devise a way to use information on excessive absences and withdrawals in “real time” to intervene with students *before they are lost*.

Identify a lead agency to take responsibility for large-scale outreach and referral for dropouts

Outreach is a critical part of a dropout recovery strategy. Though there are elements in place and a pilot project planned, the responsibility for outreach to dropouts does not rest with the BPS or any other public agency. A systemic approach needs to be developed and owned. As new program options for dropout prevention and recovery are developed, an aggressive outreach and referral effort is needed. Such an approach can shorten the time it takes to engage alienated young people who are otherwise reluctant to initiate the process of enrolling. As outreach workers refer youth to programs, they should also document the “fit” between the characteristics of the dropouts and the supply of programs.

Develop a clearinghouse of information on education and training options for dropouts and struggling students

The BPS Offices of Alternative Education and High School Renewal have made a first step by starting to catalog the options. This catalog should be published and distributed widely. A next step would be for the BPS, community programs and referral providers to become more familiar with the schools and programs through visits and presentations.

Recommendation #3:

Increase the number and variety of alternative education and training opportunities

Restore FY 05 level of funding to community-based alternative education programs to maintain capacity

The BPS should consider committing \$500,000 to community-based alternative education, restoring 100 seats that were cut when Department of Labor funding for the Youth Opportunity Center ended in 2005.

More seats and program options are needed for students who are on the brink of dropping out or for those who have already left.





Parents and students alike want stronger relationships with teachers and counselors. The BPS can build on its initial work to make schools more supportive.

Increase the number of alternative education seats by 500 over the next three years

There is an important role for both the BPS and the community-based alternative education programs. Youth service workers have testified how important it is for dropouts and students with serious barriers to have alternative options. As partners focus more efforts on outreach and intervention, the capacity of existing programs will be stretched. Therefore, it is important to plan an increase on both sides, whether by increasing seats in existing programs or by opening new programs.

Expand programs that are effective for the most disconnected groups

Black and Latino youth are most left behind in test scores and the dropout rate, and Black men appear to bear the worst consequences of dropping out. It is important to target strategies that can address these disparities.

Increase the capacity of community-based programs to address serious skill deficits and to serve dropouts with learning disabilities and emotional disorders

Though community-based programs serve some of the neediest students in the city, few have the resources and expertise necessary to address serious special needs. The Boston Youth Services Network should catalog and share effective approaches across organizations and identify areas that will require outside expertise. Community-based programs should work with the BPS Special Education department and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

Increase occupational skills training for older youth and young adults

New options are needed for 18-24 year olds who show up on the doorstep of second-chance education or training programs with low academic skills. Hands-on learning works best for many older students who have left school. Programs that train for occupations such as HVAC, auto-repair, construction and maintenance can lead these young adults back into formal education and

training. Boston and the Commonwealth should develop occupational training in areas of high demand that attract older youth who are not interested in returning to school immediately.

Promote and expand Boston's promising practices

Some BPS schools and other schools on the national front have done leading work in ensuring the success of all students, including those who have the greatest struggles. The Youth Transitions Task Force should work with the BPS to document these instructional practices and devise ways to enable other schools and programs to incorporate these model practices.

Recommendation #4:

Create school climates that are welcoming and respectful for students and parents

Deepen the effort to create smaller, more personalized school environments and more engaging instruction

The BPS is creating new small schools and dividing larger high schools into smaller learning communities. It is striving to improve school climate through more interactive instruction, common planning among teachers, the creation of parent liaison positions and teacher-led student advisory periods. Nevertheless, many students and parents still feel alienated. Parents and students want stronger relationships with teachers and counselors. It will take a focused and sustained effort to realize the potential of these new structures and practices.

Provide enhanced student and family support models and use community partners to provide individualized support

The BPS should adopt service models that provide more individualized attention for students and families, such as the new federally-funded Safe Schools, Healthy Students Initiative, so that teams of teachers and clinicians can intervene with truants and struggling students. The school system should encourage partnerships with community agencies with expertise in providing social

and emotional support and promoting positive youth development. Boston After School and Beyond is well positioned to organize community partners and after-school programs to increase support for students at risk of dropping out.

Improve communication between schools and parents

The Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), a network of 29 community groups working to increase parent involvement in the BPS, is focusing its efforts on improved communication between schools and parents, particularly immigrant parents. BPON and the BPS should work together to develop strong policies and practices that close gaps in communication.

Recommendation #5

Increase coordination among schools, alternative programs and city agencies to close gaps in the second chance system

Convene a multi-agency alternative education planning group, and charge a BPS leader with its coordination

A more focused group of stakeholders needs to develop a plan that integrates outreach, referral, data management and professional development for alternative programs and support services, both inside and outside of the BPS. The Youth Transitions Task Force recommends that the BPS charge a staff member with organizing this group. The plan should forge connections among the systems that serve youth. The goal is to leverage complementary programs and to prevent young people from falling into the gaps and disappearing.

Develop quality indicators that apply to both BPS alternative schools and community-based programs

Because community-based alternative programs and BPS alternative schools have operated separately, they do not have a common method for measuring quality and setting benchmarks for improvement. The BPS needs to follow through on its commitment to conduct quality reviews of community-based programs.

Recommendation #6:

Develop revenue strategies to support alternative programs, early intervention and outreach to dropouts

Map and analyze the funding of programs that serve dropouts and struggling students

Currently, alternative programs and related services are supported by a patchwork of public funds with expectations that are seldom in alignment. During the first year, Youth Transitions partners created a map of current programs. The next step is to identify the various funding sources that support these programs, while analyzing the impact of various funding requirements as well as their potential for supporting expansion and continuous quality improvement.

Focus public attention on allocating more resources for dropout prevention and recovery

Nationally and locally, policymakers and the general public are beginning to recognize both the social and the financial consequences of the dropout problem. Dollars spent on reducing the dropout rate in the short term will pay off in huge cost savings down the line.

Massachusetts Education Commissioner David Driscoll has recently assigned staff to support secondary and alternative programming aimed at reducing the dropout rate. Boston civic leaders and Youth Transitions partners should work with the DOE and other state and local leaders to identify policy and funding options. The next governor should make dropout prevention and recovery a top policy and budget priority, and candidates should address the issue as part of the current campaign.

Youth Transitions partners should seek to create pathways for youth between systems, as well as to leverage complementary program development in the areas of alternative education, training, and transitional employment.

MOVING FORWARD



Ironically, the very size of the dropout problem makes it hard to grasp. In the words of one parent, “It’s the problem that is too big to be seen.”

Halfway through this two-year research and planning project, Boston’s Youth Transition Task Force has collected and analyzed data which puts this issue into stark relief: a third of young people in Boston’s public schools are leaving school early, without a high school diploma. The consequences – both for these young people, and for their society – are disastrous. The systems that exist to respond to youth are uncoordinated and inadequate. A fundamental shift in awareness and public will is required to set things right.

In the coming year, this expanding team of leaders will develop an even stronger grasp of the factors that drive the dropout crisis, and continue efforts to design more effective and ambitious responses to it. Their goal is to frame a debate within the city and the Commonwealth that helps all stakeholders to understand the urgency of the situation, and lead to a bold, public, and shared commitment to change.

Three challenges must be met if this effort is to succeed:

1) First, the dropout crisis must overcome its current status as an “invisible” or “quiet” phenomenon. Ironically, the very size of the problem makes it hard to grasp. In the words of one parent, “It’s the problem that is too big to be seen.” Leaders seeking to focus public attention on this issue must learn to overcome this resistance to seeing the problem clearly, in all its size and complexity. This is not a simple task.

2) Overcoming disconnection is another key challenge. A dropout, after all, is a person who has become disconnected, with varying degrees of awareness and control, from school, from future opportunity, and often from any form of positive social contact.

Even those youth who find themselves connected to other agencies – such as DSS or DYS – are seldom engaged in strong, positive, and lasting mutual ties to adults who can help them in their struggles.

3) Ironically, the agencies and organizations that deal with dropouts and struggling students share this problem of disconnection. Few of the schools and programs available to Boston dropouts or struggling students are well connected to one another. Boston lacks a system and lead partner for organizing education, career opportunities, outreach and support services around dropouts. This must change before results can.

Ultimately, Boston must find a way to take up a shared responsibility for tackling the dropout crisis. Across the country, communities avoid this issue out of fear. Parents and teachers fear being blamed, principals and superintendents feel targeted unfairly, and agencies and alternative programs tend to keep a low profile. Youth, inevitably, are the most common scapegoat.

The Youth Transitions process has made a practice of laying blame aside, generating and sharing data freely, and agreeing that better work will emerge from this open-handed approach. The members of the Youth Transitions Task Force believe this is the right way to meet the challenges that Boston and so many of its youth are facing.

APPENDIX A

BOSTON YOUTH TRANSITIONS TASK FORCE

1. Core Partners

Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) convenes the Youth Transitions Task Force. The PIC is a business led intermediary organization founded in 1979, currently chaired by Brigham and Women's Hospital President Gary L. Gottlieb, M.D. Serving as Boston's Workforce Investment Board and convenor of the Boston Compact, the PIC convenes local leadership around education and workforce priorities, brokers employer partnerships, connects youth and adults with education and employment opportunities, and measures program impact, as well as quality and scale. The PIC agenda is designed to meet the needs of both the community and employers.

Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) is the community voice partner on the Youth Transitions Task Force and conducted parent focus groups for the Youth Transitions report. BPON is a city-wide network of 36 member community-based organizations. BPON mobilizes parents to be active in school-parent organizations and advocates for school policies that support parents. Last year, BPON's campaign to increase the number of school-based parent liaisons in the BPS contributed to the addition of 17 parent liaisons to BPS staff. This year's campaign focuses on improving communication between the schools and parents.

Boston Public Schools (BPS) serves a total of 57,860 students: 26,220 elementary, 12,770 middle school and 18,870 high school students. Recent initiatives to improve schools include opening small pilot and alternative schools and breaking the large district high schools into small schools and learning communities. Boston is also piloting K-8 schools to better engage middle-school age children. The Office of High School Renewal was formed three years ago to organize and support restructuring the high schools and the Office of Alternative Education oversees the BPS diploma-granting alternative programs in Boston. The Office of Unified Support Services oversees guidance, student support, special education and alternative education in the BPS.

Boston Youth Service Network (BYSN) is a network of community-based organizations offering alternative education and career explorations to about 1000 youth. They collaborate around professional development, referrals for clients and program development. Current goals are to better coordinate youth services across the network; develop a network data system; build stronger lines of communication with the Boston Public Schools; and increase advocacy capacity.

Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services funds and administers community-based youth programming supported by federal and local workforce development funding. JCS also administers adult education and workforce development programs for the city. JCS is a major funder of alterna-

tive education in Boston, through various federal and local funds. JCS piloted funding of an occupational skills training program that targets young, disconnected men.

Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) at Northeastern University is researching Boston's dropout trends as part of Youth Transitions project. The CLMS is an applied research, education, and policy-oriented technical assistance unit established to conduct applied labor market research in the New England area. The CLMS and the PIC have documented annual BPS graduate outcomes in a "year-out" study for over 20 years.

Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp) co-convened the Youth Transitions Task Force during Year One. CommCorp is a quasi-public statewide organization promoting initiatives that meet the labor needs of businesses, improve workers' skills, and foster career success through lifelong learning. Commonwealth Corporation is working on two fronts related to Youth Transitions. 1) Pathways to Success by 21 (P21) is an initiative to organize *state* agencies to better collaborate on *state* policy and programming and to seed *local* collaboratives across the state. These groups are focused on better coordination across agencies and systems at the local level. 2) CommCorp is the lead partner in DYS education reform work.

Jobs for the Future (JFF) provides technical assistance to the Youth Transitions Task Force. JFF is a non-profit research, consulting, and advocacy organization that works to strengthen society by creating educational and economic opportunity for those who need it most. JFF provides technical assistance on the Youth Transitions grants, and provides the Youth Transitions Task Force with research and best practices from other regions.

Youth Opportunity Boston (YO) is a program that connects disengaged youth with employment, education and case management support. Six years in operation, YO has specialized in providing support services to adjudicated youth. YO members include those referred by Juvenile Probation, or re-entry youth returning to the community from DYS detention or the county House of Correction. Though faced with the end of its federal grant, YO continues to provide much-needed services and support for adjudicated youth.

2. Community and State Partners

Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA) Capacity Tank organizes faith-based organizations and community-based organizations in the High Risk Youth Network, using Compassion Capital funds, to provide support and employment services for Boston's most disconnected youth. The BMA conducted

a needs assessment and based on its findings, the BMA is prioritizing employment connections, program standards, and filling in gaps between services.

Boston After School & Beyond (Boston Beyond) is a public-private partnership established in 2005 to continue the work initiated by Mayor Thomas M. Menino's 2:00 to 6:00 Initiative. This initiative is focused on providing quality after-school programming for youth of all ages. Boston Beyond's Teen Initiative is organizing community-based organizations and the BPS to target after-school activities for 9th graders at risk of dropping out.

The Boston Foundation (TBF) is Boston's local community foundation. The Boston Foundation's Discretionary Funds give priority to community-building strategies that help children and families overcome poverty. The Boston Foundation prides itself on working with organizations and government to find new ways to build community. TBF is actively involved with Boston After School and Beyond's Teen Initiative and the Black Ministerial Alliances' High Risk Youth Service Network, as well as the Youth Transitions Task Force.

Boston Higher Education Partnership (BHEP) is a collaboration between the BPS and the higher education community to promote quality teaching and learning for Boston public school students. The goal is to graduate college-ready students and help students obtain scholarships to college. BHEP is planning to conduct a qualitative college retention study of BPS graduates over the coming year.

Boston's One-Stop Career Centers: *Boston Career Link, JobNet and The Work Place.* Serving over 28,000 in fiscal year 2005, Boston's three career centers assist individuals to connect with employment and training, and provide intensive services to groups who need more supported transitions to work. The career centers also provide intensive services to young adults who have left high school without passing MCAS.

Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) works in close partnership with the Boston Public Schools to refine professional development for all teachers and principals and to improve literacy instruction in all classrooms. BPE plays two roles: to test new ideas that hold promise for accelerating school improvements and to press the district to change policies and practices that slow reform. BPE is a community partner for the Carnegie and Gates high school reform work in the BPS, along with the CCE, JFF and the PIC.

Boston Police Department (BPD) has long practiced the community policing approach and has partnered with youth initiatives throughout the city to bring down youth crime levels. BPD is an active partner with YO, in both the young adult reentry initiative and the DYS reentry initiative. BPD's Director of Public Affairs and Community Programs is an active member of the Youth Council.

Boston Student Advisory Committee (BSAC) is a citywide body of student leaders representing their respective high schools. It serves as the voice of students to the Boston School Committee. Students offer their perspectives on high school renewal efforts and inform their respective schools about relevant citywide school issues. During school year 2005-2006, some of the issues BSAC has taken on are the lockout policy and the dropout rate. BSAC researched students' perspectives on these issues and shared them with the school committee, the media, and most recently, the Youth Transitions Task Force.

Boston Urban Youth Foundation (BUYF) provides dropout prevention for middle school truants. BUYF serves over 500 youth ages 11-18 from the Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods of Boston. BUYF combines case management, mentoring, academic skill-building, vision casting, and positive peer group experiences to build positive futures, one child at a time. BUYF has been a strong advocate for middle school intervention on the Youth Transitions Task Force.

Boston WIA Youth Council generated initial research on youth need and service systems for the Youth Transitions Task Force. The Youth Council, currently chaired by Citizens Bank Senior Vice President Michael O'Neill, oversees US Department of Labor funds for youth initiatives. In Boston, these funds support alternative education and career explorations. The Youth Council comprises private sector, public sector and community-based members and is a subcommittee of Boston's Workforce Investment Board.

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) is an urban community college with 7,800 students. Offerings include associates degree, employment certification, adult education and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs. BHCC provides MCAS preparation classes free of charge for BPS students who have exited high school without passing the MCAS.

Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) is focused on improving student learning in K-12 public schools and districts by creating small, democratic, and equitable schools. In Boston, the CCE is the coordinating organization for the 19 Boston Pilot Schools. The CCE provides technical assistance to BPS small high schools. Recently, the CCE published *Progress and Promise*, a study of Boston's pilot schools showing positive engagement and performance measures for the pilot schools.

Communities for People (CFP) is a private, non-profit agency chartered to serve youth and families in need of support. CFP provides residential services to adolescents and mentally retarded individuals ages 13 and up, foster care, adoption, outreach, independent living and managed care services to children, families and adolescents. CFP is the lead partner organizing community connections for the Boston Area DSS offices in the new DSS service delivery model.

COMPASS is a private non-profit organization that includes community programs for high risk children with behavioral, social and educational disabilities. The Compass School is a private Chapter 766 Day school for students ages 6-22, with an average student-teacher ratio of 6-to-1.

Comprehensive School Age Parenting Program (CSAPP) is a school-based teen parenting program. Operating out of several Boston public middle and high schools, CSAPP provides counseling, case management, information, referral, outreach, and educational services in human growth and development, parenting, and life options.

Diamond Educators is a group of multi-cultural male professionals who serve as mentors to young males living in Boston. The Diamond Educators are men dedicated to building respect integrity, and success through education and mentoring.

Emerging Leaders Program led facilitation of the youth focus groups for the Youth Transitions research. The Emerging Leaders team also presented the focus group results to Mayor Menino in fall of 2005. The Emerging Leaders Programs is a leadership development project run by the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The program combines seminars with community projects for professionals from the private, public and non-profit sectors. Teams tackle a local problem to develop leadership and cross-disciplinary problem-solving skills.

Friends of the Shattuck Shelter (FOSS) is a community-based non-profit dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness. The FOSS provides a continuum of programs including employment, behavioral health, HIV/AIDS services, emergency shelter, and transitional and permanent housing for homeless and at risk adults. Additionally, FOSS's Impact Employment Services provides employability skills and job placement services, with special emphasis on young adults.

The Home for Little Wanderers (The Home) is a private, non-profit child and family service agency providing services to thousands of children and families each year. The mission of The Home is to ensure the healthy emotional, mental, and social development of children at risk, their families, and communities through an integrated system of prevention, advocacy, research, and direct care services. Programs include adoption programs and both support services and residential programs for youth in foster care.

Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has recognized the dropout problem in a thorough state study titled "Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004" released in October 2005. This study shows the state annual dropout rate to be the highest in 14 years, with Latino, Black, low-income, special education and bilingual students faring the worst. Commissioner David Driscoll has made a public commitment to address the dropout problem and has developed a new unit – Student and Secondary Support. Massachusetts was one of 10 states to be granted the

National Governors Association grant to increase college-readiness, decrease the dropout rate and implement a progressive graduation rate measure for state high schools.

Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) has just made a major shift in its philosophy and its subcontracting process to focus more on building stronger community connections for youth in foster care. Each region now has a subcontractor responsible for developing community connections. The goal is to build a comprehensive continuum of family support by better coordinating existing community resources, involving residents in planning for local resources, and ensuring that existing resources meet the needs. Boston's DSS resource network is organized by Communities for People.

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), the state agency responsible for administering public assistance programs, has worked with the public schools to make school attendance a requirement for children of young mothers under the age of 18. DTA has specialized case workers who work with teens and young adult mothers. DTA funds about 110 seats in community-based alternative education (primarily GED) for 14-21 year olds through its Young Parents Program.

Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS), the state juvenile justice agency, is in the midst of a committed effort to improve both its in-house education programs and its connections to public schools for youth re-entering the community. DYS has partnered with YO for several years on a Boston Reentry Initiative, which combines intensive support with education and employment opportunities. DYS has invested \$21 million over 5 years in its education improvement effort. DYS partners with BPS on the Success Initiative, which supports reentering DYS youth to transition back into the school system.

Roxbury Community College (RCC) is an urban college dedicated to serving communities with predominately minority and recent immigrant populations, with a total of 2,400 students enrolled in credit courses. In addition to associates degrees, RCC offers employment certification, GED preparation and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs. RCC offers free MCAS preparation classes for BPS students who have exited the Boston Public Schools without passing MCAS.

Youth Advocacy Project provides advocacy and legal representation for young people who are unable to pay for counsel in delinquency and youthful offender cases, as well as in related disciplinary and administrative proceedings. The project offers clinical assessment, service planning, and referrals to high-risk youth to prevent chronic court involvement and help them lead productive lives.

APPENDIX B

RELATED RESEARCH REPORTS

Boston Youth Transitions Research Products
@ www.bostonpic.org, Youth, Youth Transitions

Quantitative Research

Khatiawada, I., McLaughlin, J., and Sum, A. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston: A Profile of Their Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics and Their Labor Market Experiences and Problems*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University (CLMS), October, 2005.

Sum, A. et al. *Measuring High School Graduation and Dropout Rates in the Boston Public Schools: The Finding of Alternative Estimating Methodologies*, Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS), Northeastern University, August, 2005.

CLMS, Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). *Boston Public School Class of 2003 Graduate and Dropout Study* May, 2005.

Boston PIC. *Profile of Boston's Struggling Students and Disconnected Youth*, November, 2004.

Qualitative Research

Commonwealth Corporation and Boston PIC. *Youth Focus Group Results: Issues Impacting Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth*, August, 2005.

Boston Parent Organizing Network. *Parent Focus Group Results: Identifying Issues Impacting Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth*, July, 2005.

Systems Mapping

Boston PIC. *An Initial Review of Education, Employment and Support Services for Boston's Struggling Students and Disconnected Youth*, January 2005.

Boston PIC, *A Second Review of Youth Services*, January 2005.

National Research

Annie E. Casey Foundation. *2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book and Online Database* @www.aecf.org, KIDS COUNT.

Barton, P. *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, 2005.

Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J. Jr., Morison, K. B., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, March, 2006.

Orfield, G. Editor. *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, 2004.

Richard, A. *Researchers Tally Costs of Education Failings*, Education Week, November 2, 2005.

Sum, A., Harrington P. et al. *The Hidden Crisis in the High School: Dropout Problems of Young Adults in the US*, CLMS, 2002.

Sum, A., et al. *The Lifetime Fiscal Benefits to Illinois Taxpayers and Individuals who Return and Finish High School*, CLMS, 2004.

Other Reports

Boston Public Schools. *The BPS at a Glance* @ www.boston.k12.ma.us, About the BPS, Facts and Figures.

Boston Public Schools. *A Decade of Transforming the Boston Public Schools* @ www.boston.k12.ma.us, About the BPS, Publications.

Boston Public Schools, Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation. *Q & A: Boston Public School 2003-2004: Student Dropout*, February, 2005.

Center for Collaborative Education. *Progress and Promise: Results from the Boston Pilot Schools*, January, 2006 @www.cce.org, Publications and Links.

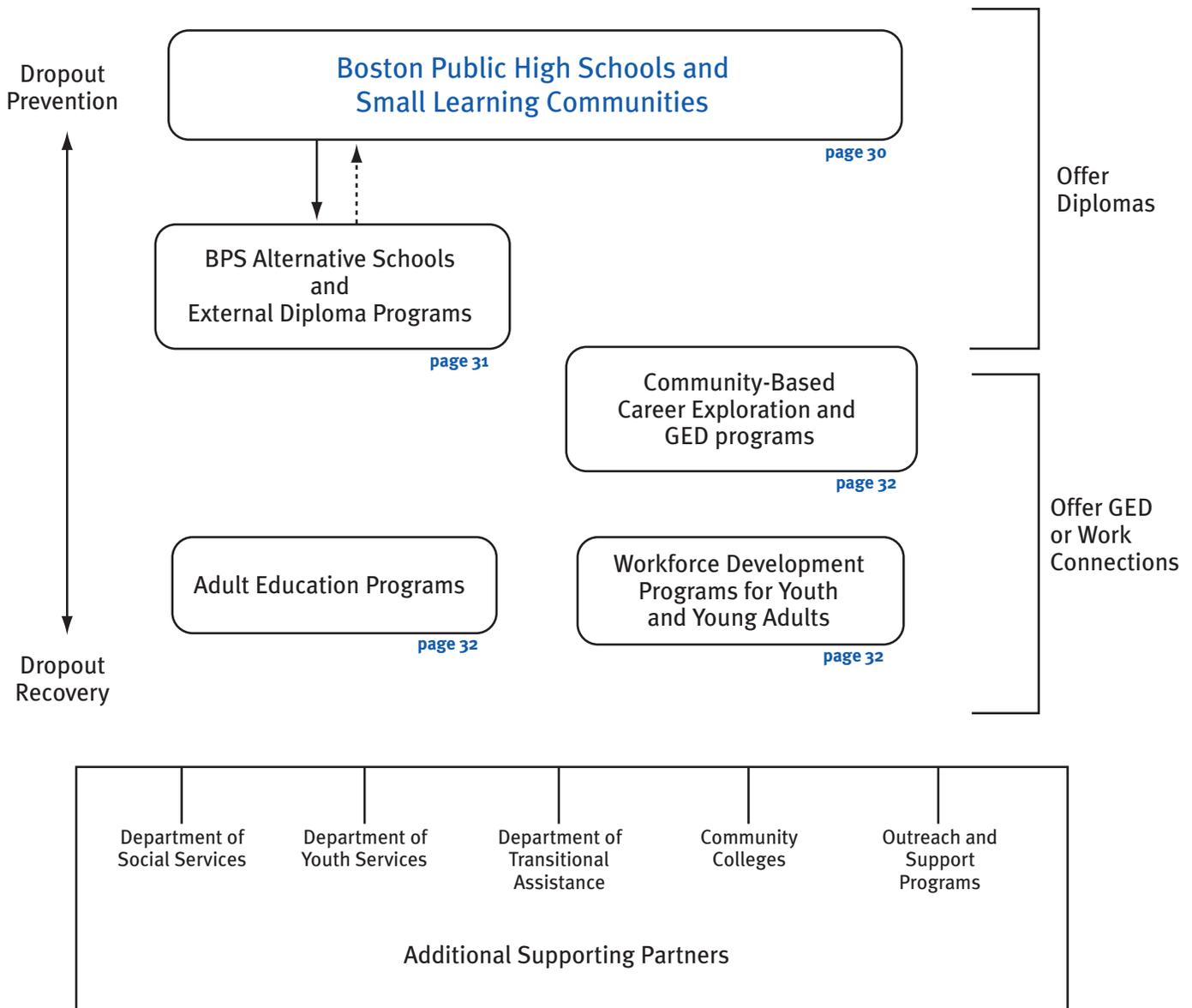
CLMS. Various studies of post-graduate outcomes for Boston Public Schools Students, 1999-2004 @ www.bostonpic.org, Boston Compact, Policy Papers, Reports & Speeches.

Massachusetts Department of Education. *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-04*, @ www.doe.mass.edu, District/School Administration, Information Services, Statistical Reports.

Navin Associates. *Boston High Risk Youth Network: Needs Assessment of Boston's Youth at High Risk*, prepared for the Boston Capacity Tank, September, 2005.

APPENDIX C

DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY IN BOSTON



The diagram above portrays the various layers of Boston’s current safety net for high school dropouts and struggling students. The individual schools and programs that exist within each category are listed on the following pages.

Boston Public High Schools and Small Learning Communities

NAME	THEME	COMPLEX
SMALL SCHOOLS		
Academy of Public Service	Public Service	Dorchester Education Complex
Boston Adult Technical Academy	Diploma Plus	
Boston International High School	International Students/ English Language Learners	
Community Transition School	Portfolio-Based Curriculum	
Edward G. Noonan, Jr. Business Academy (NBA)	Economics and Business	Dorchester Education Complex
Excel High School	Media Technology	South Boston Education Complex
Monument High School	Criminal Justice and Public Safety	South Boston Education Complex
Odyssey High School	Environmental Science	South Boston Education Complex
NEW SMALL SCHOOLS (OPENED SEPTEMBER 2005)		
Brook Farm Business Academy	Business and Service	West Roxbury Education Complex
Community Academy of Science and Health	Science and Health	Hyde Park Education Complex
Media Communications Technology High School	Media and Communications	West Roxbury Education Complex
Parkway Academy of Technology and Health	Technology, Health Careers, Health-Wellness	West Roxbury Education Complex
Social Justice Academy	Social Justice	Hyde Park Education Complex
The Engineering School	Engineering	Hyde Park Education Complex
Urban Science Academy	Environmental and Biological Sciences	West Roxbury Education Complex
PILOT SCHOOLS		
Another Course to College	College Preparatory Curriculum	
Boston Arts Academy	Visual and Performing Arts	
Boston Community Leadership Academy	Community and Leadership	
Fenway High School	Lifelong learning and community leadership	
Greater Egleston Community High School	Ungraded Project-Based Curriculum	
New Mission High School	Project-Based Curriculum	
Quincy Upper School	6-12 School	
TechBoston Academy	Technology, Computer Science and Engineering	Dorchester Education Complex
HORACE MANN CHARTER SCHOOLS		
Boston Day and Evening Academy	Competency Based Learning	Wheatley Education Complex
Health Careers Academy	Health and Health Careers	
SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES / PATHWAYS		
NAME	PATHWAY	
Brighton High School	Business and Technology • Health Professions • Law and Government • Education (TeachBoston) • Media Arts and Communications	
Burke High School	Information Technology • Arts and Humanities • Health and Human Services	
Charlestown High School	Web Design and Cisco Networking • Law & Justice • Bio-Engineering • Finance and Economics • Forensic Sciences	
East Boston High School	Theme: Business • Entrepreneurship • Travel and Tourism • Health and Human Services • TEACHBoston	
Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Deaf Education • Multimedia • Math Science and Technology	
M.S. Snowden International School at Copley	World Languages and International Studies	
The English High School	Finance and Technology • Arts and Media • Global Studies • Science and Engineering	
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION		
Madison Park Technical Vocational High School	Construction, Design and Transportation • High Tech • Health and Human Services	
EXAM SCHOOLS		
Boston Latin Academy	Classical Liberal Arts Preparatory School	
Boston Latin School	Classical Liberal Arts Preparatory School	
John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science		

Programs Providing Alternative Education, GED Preparation and Workforce Development Services

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Boston Adult Technical Academy	Diploma program for older students, 20-22, especially newcomers
Boston Community Academy	Transition program for students, grades 8-12, who have violated the BPS code of discipline or are not progressing towards graduation
Boston Community Transition School	Transition program for DYS-committed youth reentering the BPS
Boston Day and Evening Academy	Transition program for overage 9th graders and diploma program for overage 10th-12th graders
Boston Middle School Academy	Transition program for middle school students who have violated the BPS code of discipline
Greater Egleston Community High	Small pilot school with diploma program, taking School holistic approach for students 16-21

BPS DIPLOMA PROGRAMS AT COMMUNITY-BASED SITES

ABCD University High School	BPS diploma program for youth 16-21 who are overage or dropouts
City Roots Alternative High School	BPS diploma and GED test preparation for high school students who are struggling, truant or dropouts
Crittenton Hastings House Chances	Transition program for women 16-21 who are pregnant or parenting
Dorchester Youth Alternative Academy	Education and life skills for students referred by Boston Juvenile Court or the Department of Social Services through Child in Need of Services (CHINS) process
EDCO Youth Alternative	BPS diploma program for youth 14-21 who are overage and low-income
El Centro Del Cardenal	BPS diploma program for youth 15-21 who are overage or dropouts; for both Spanish or English speakers
Little House Alternative School	Transition program for middle school students, 11-14, at risk due to academics or attendance
St. Mary's Alternative School	Transitional program for young women who are pregnant

COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVE, GED AND CAREER EXPLORATION PROGRAMS

EDUCATION AND GED

Asian YES	GED preparation
Bridge Over Troubled Waters	GED preparation
Crittenton Hastings House	GED preparation
El Centro Del Cardenal	GED preparation for English and Spanish speakers
GED Plus	GED preparation for dropouts and adjudicated youth
Log School	GED preparation
Notre Dame	Diploma and GED preparation
YouthBuild	GED preparation

CAREER EXPLORATIONS

ABCD	Building trades, facilities maintenance, technology
Hull Lifesaving Museum	Maritime trades
Hyde Square Task Force	Health careers
Sociedad Latina	Health careers
Youth Build	Building trades

ADULT EDUCATION*

Blackstone Community Center	GED and pre-GED
Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center	ESOL
Boston Public Schools Adult Education	External diploma, GED, ABE, ESOL
East Boston Harborside Community Center	ESOL, GED, ABE, External diploma
Jamaica Plain Community Center	ESOL, GED, ABE, External diploma
Mujeres Unidas en Accion	ESOL, ABE, GED

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT*

JOB TRAINING

Asian American Civic Association	Automotive repair training
JobCorps	Auto Repair, technology, building trades, culinary arts training
YearUp	IT and Web Design training
Jewish Vocational Services	Culinary training
JFY Networks	Environmental technology training
Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries	Retail, culinary training

TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT/EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

Youth Opportunity	Adjudicated youth
Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries	Youth with low income status or barriers to employment
One-Stop Career Centers	Out-of-school youth who have not yet passed MCAS

*This is not a comprehensive list of adult programs. It is a partial list including those most commonly known to serve older youth/young adults in recent years.

APPENDIX D

BOSTON COMPACT 2000

The following goals and accountability measures serve as the targets of the current Boston Compact.

Goal One **Meet the “High Standards” Challenge**

- A) Teaching and Learning Strategies
- B) Parents, Families and Community

Accountability Measures

- Graduation/Drop-out rates
- MCAS scores
- MCAS success after initial failure
- Attendance rate
- State funding for Boston Public Schools

Goal Two **Increase Opportunities for College and Career Success**

Accountability Measures

- College and employment success rates (One year and five years after graduation)
- College retention (14th year completion rate)
- Graduates meeting the four year, public college admission requirements – GPA, SAT, required courses (Note: these are also the minimum requirements for four-year independent colleges.)
- Students taking PSAT and SAT

Goal Three **Recruit and Prepare the Next Generation of Teachers and Principals**

Accountability Measures

- Qualified applicants for teaching positions (by content area, by race)
- Colleges and universities signing the new teacher preparation agreement (Teacher Preparation Institutional Agreement)
- “Professional development school” agreements between individual public schools and selected colleges and universities
- Applicants offered early hiring commitments annually for specific Boston schools
- New teachers retained after first three years of teaching experience



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OUTREACH FOR DROPOUTS

EVERY YEAR, new members join the country's lost tribe of teenagers: the young people who drop out of high school. Because they are not in school, they are not helped by President Bush's signature No Child Left Behind program, giving a tragic irony to that name.

The size of the tribe: In October 2001, 3.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds nationwide had not completed and were not enrolled in high school—10.7 percent of the age group. The problem explodes in cities. The projected four-year dropout rate for Boston's class of 2006 is 27 percent, according to the state Department of Education. In Springfield it's 29 percent. In Lawrence it's 35 percent. The consequences of "so much lack of success," according to Neil Sullivan, head of the Boston Private Industry Council, are "varying degrees of damage" from lost potential to long-term unemployment to teenagers who grow up to become inmates. "High school is not the problem, it's where we see the problem," Sullivan says. "Even our best efforts are merely nicking the problem." Hope lies in these nicks. Expand the best efforts and they become fountains of that great American commodity: a second chance. It's hard work, but last month a coalition of charitable organizations—including the Carnegie, Gates, and Mott foundations announced a \$2 million project to analyze and lower the dropout rate in five cities—Boston,

New York, Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., and San Jose—places that have a lot of dropouts and effective programs to help them.

Sullivan sums it up as: No teenager left behind.

In Boston, analysis will mix with action. The city, state, and community organizations will be involved. There will be research on data, students' personal histories, and focus groups as well as steps that build on programs that already work. The challenge will be making sure that the action doesn't run too far ahead of the data and the insights.

But the need for some improvements is clear. An anti-dropout tool that students praise is relationships with adults who are both concerned and able to help.

Larry Myatt of the Boston School Department's High School Renewal Office says high schools have to find a way to be a more therapeutic community for students who need the support. What such a school would look like is a matter for thoughtful and heartfelt debate. It could mean more social workers in schools or teachers taking basic steps such as discussing their own college experiences, reinforcing the importance and possibility of higher education. The goal is to create an inviting adult community that's attractive enough to lure teenagers away from dropping out.

With work, cities can show high school dropouts a variety of open doors, each marked with the word "Opportunity."

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Youth Transitions partners vetted these recommendations with a number of community groups, ranging from parent organizing groups (through the Boston Parent Organizing Network), to the WIA Youth Council, BPS and community partners. A number of changes and improvements were made. The process is iterative by design, to bring attention to the problems, focus the best data on the questions at hand, encourage broad participation, and build consensus around the recommendations.
- ² Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *Q & A, Boston Public Schools, 2003-2004: Student Dropout, Boston Public Schools, February, 2005*; Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004*, October, 2005, Appendix A, p.1.
- ³ Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004*, October, 2005, Appendix C, p.1. For an overview of the national dropout rate and consequences, see Barton, P. *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, 2005.
- ⁴ Khatiwada, I., McLaughlin, J., and Sum, A. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston: A Profile of Their Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics and Their Labor Market Experiences and Problems*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, October 2005, p.5. The GED is a certificate awarded on completion of the Tests of General Educational Development, and is an alternative to a high school diploma.
- ⁵ According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *2004 American Community Survey* and *2004 Current Population Survey*, there are 3.8 million 16-24 year-old dropouts living in the U.S.
- ⁶ For a comprehensive review of dropout problems, their causes and consequences see Andrew Sum, Paul Harrington et al, *The Hidden Crisis in the High School: Dropout Problems of Young Adults in the US*, The Center for Labor Market Studies, 2002, and Gary Orfield, Editor. *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, 2004.
- ⁷ Boston Private Industry Council, *The Post-Secondary Schooling and Labor Market Experiences of Class of 2003 Boston Public High School Graduates*, Annual Meeting Presentation, 2005.
- ⁸ Richard, A. *Researchers Tally Costs of Education Failings* (citing the research of Cecilia Rouse, Professor of Economics, Princeton University), Education Week, November 2, 2005.
- ⁹ Khatiwada, I. and Sum, A. *The Post-Secondary Schooling and Labor Market Experiences of Class of 2004 Boston Public School Graduates: Executive Summary*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, pp.10-16.
- ¹⁰ Khatiwada, I., McLaughlin, J., and Sum, A. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston: A Profile of Their Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics and Their Labor Market Experiences and Problems*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, October 2005. See pp 11-15 for a discussion of Boston's youth employment rates for dropouts; pp. 18-20, for a discussion of dropouts' earnings by race-ethnic group and p. 32 for the institutionalization rate of dropouts by race-ethnic group.
- ¹¹ For foundational systems mapping work for this project, see Boston PIC, *An Initial Review of Education, Employment and Support Services for Boston's Struggling Students and Disconnected Youth*, January, 2005; Boston PIC, *Second Review of Youth Services*, January, 2005. Current numbers differ because they have been updated for FY 06.
- ¹² Khatiwada, I. and Sum A. *Post Secondary Schooling and Labor Market Experiences*, p.7.
- ¹³ No data currently exists on the college performance and retention of these graduates. This will be a key research finding to test the long-term positive effects of graduating from the BPS.
- ¹⁴ Military service personnel are excluded from the count of employed in both the city of Boston and the U.S.
- ¹⁵ These numbers are culled from similar, but not identical, data sets. The DOE measure is significantly higher because it allows students only four years to graduate, and counts as dropouts any students transferring into high school who later drop out of the BPS. The BPS figure is lower because it measures only those who drop out from the original 9th grade cohort, and it allows them a fifth year to finish school. See Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *Q & A, Boston Public Schools, 2003-2004: Student Dropout, Boston Public Schools, February, 2005*; Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004*, October, 2005.
- ¹⁶ A. Sum, et al., *Measuring High School Graduation and Dropout Rates in the Boston Public Schools: The Findings of Alternative Estimating Methodologies*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, August 2005. The 2003 graduation figure is calculated using a formula called the Basic Completion Rate (BCR), which compares the actual graduates from high school in one year with the number of 9th graders four years earlier. The BCR measure works without using dropout estimates, tests the "holding power" of a system, and treats all leavers (dropouts, transfers, etc.) the same.
- ¹⁷ Khatiwada, I., McLaughlin, J., and Sum, A. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*, p.8.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p.6.

- ¹⁹ For more on this increase, see Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, Q & A: *Boston Public Schools 2003-2004: Student Dropout*, Boston Public Schools, February 2005.
- ²⁰ Khatiwada, I. et al. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*, pp.23-24.
- ²¹ *Ibid.* See also Khatiwada et al. *College Enrollment and Labor Market Outcomes for the Class of 2003 Boston Public High School Graduates*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, December, 2004.
- ²² Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *How do Dropouts Vary by Educational Programs?* Boston Public Schools, 2005.
- ²³ Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004*, October, 2005, p.12. It is important to note that students who fail the MCAS are more likely to drop out, in line with the general pattern that struggling students are more likely to drop out. This study found that 13.5% of 11th graders who failed dropped out, compared with 1.5% of those who passed. However, the finding that such a high proportion of students dropped out after passing the MCAS is an important caution to those who focus solely on academic performance as a risk factor.
- ²⁴ Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *SY2002-2003 Student Dropout: Grade Retention and Dropouts*, Boston Public Schools, June, 2004.
- ²⁵ Office of High School Renewal, Boston Public Schools, January, 2006; Department of Youth Services, December, 2005.
- ²⁶ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT*, 2004.
- ²⁷ Massachusetts Department of Social Services, March, 2005.
- ²⁸ Casey, *KIDS COUNT*, 2004.
- ²⁹ Khatiwada, I., et al., *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*, pp.26-27.
- ³⁰ Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, March 2005.
- ³¹ Khatiwada, I., et al., *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*, p.15.
- ³² The Center for Labor Market Studies, *The Post-Secondary Schooling and Labor Market Experiences of Class of 2003 Boston Public High School Graduates*, Boston Private Industry Council Annual Meeting Presentation, 2005.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Khatiwada, I. and Sum, A. *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*, pp.22-32.
- ³⁵ “Institutionalized” refers to those in prison, mental institutions and nursing homes. For this age group, the vast majority would be in prison.
- ³⁶ Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *Relationship between Dropouts, Grade Level and Attendance*, 2005; Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropouts in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2003-2004*, p.10.
- ³⁷ Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *What Was the Degree of Students’ Movement in and out of School During SY 2003-2004?* Boston Public Schools, 2005.
- ³⁸ Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, *To What Degree Does Student Mobility Affect Performance on MCAS?* Boston Public Schools, 2005.
- ³⁹ Khatiwada, I., et al., *Young High School Dropouts in Boston*.
- ⁴⁰ Sum, A. and Khatiwada, I. with Palma, S. and Perron, S. *Still Young, Restless and Jobless: The Growing Employment Malaise Among U.S. Teens and Young Adults*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, January, 2004.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² This team collaborated to organize focus groups with 120 youth and young adults. Organizers emphasized organizing those most representative of the disconnected youth population. 67% were no longer in public school. Over half of the participants were young men; 46% were African American; 31% were Latino. Youth were asked how they felt about school, career plans, and other programs they participated in. See CommCorp, Boston PIC, *Youth Focus Group Results: Issues Impacting Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth*, August, 2005.
- ⁴³ Boston Parent Organizing Network, *Identifying Issues Impacting Out-of-School Youth and Struggling Boston Public School Students*, July, 2005.
- ⁴⁴ Center for Collaborative Education, *Progress and Promise: Results from the Boston Pilot Schools*, 2006.
- ⁴⁵ Casey, *KIDS COUNT*, 2004.

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