

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SPENDING IN THE
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



**A Joint Report
of the
Boston Plan for Excellence
and the
Boston Public Schools**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 1998-99 school year, Boston School Committee Chair Elizabeth Reilinger and the district's Chief Operating Officer Michael Contompasis co-chaired a task force that examined how human resources practices need to change to support standards-based instruction.

In June 1999, the Task Force recommended that the district

Articulate a coherent professional development strategy ... that establishes philosophy, objectives, and standards for professional development linked to the overall system goals of improving teaching and learning and whole-school change.

This recommendation is an important next step on Boston's path to better schools. It also coincides with the Superintendent's setting of learning goals for the district: That all students will score at Level Two or better in reading and math on the state assessment by June 2003.

Standards-Based Reform in Boston

Three years ago under the leadership of Superintendent Thomas Payzant, the Boston Public Schools (BPS) launched a major effort to improve each school in the district through standards-based reform. His vision is articulated in "Focus on Children," and the district's overall implementation strategy is outlined in the "Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole-School Change."

The conceptual foundation for standards-based reform is that for student performance to dramatically improve, standards have to be set, teachers have to teach to those standards, and every student has to demonstrate proficiency on assessments aligned to those standards. A simple idea, but a daunting one because currently very few urban students are achieving to a

high standard. While the concept of teaching every child to a high standard is straightforward, many principals and teachers feel executing it under existing conditions is nearly unachievable.

Among the important findings in research about standards-based reform in other districts is that effective instruction matters. Researchers and advocates Kati Haycock, Linda Darling-Hammond, Judith Warren Little, and William Sanders, among others, have shown that the quality of teaching is the most crucial factor in student achievement that is under the control of the school. In Boston and in other districts, many schools can now show what happens when they operate differently and when teachers themselves learn and teach differently: Everyone learns, even the students most behind.

The Need for Effective Professional Development

Boston's teachers are working hard, struggling to implement all the required standards. But working hard is not enough; they also have to work effectively. Principals and teachers have not been prepared to work effectively in a high standards system, or to do what they are being asked to do. They also don't work in conditions designed to support students in meeting the district's student learning goals. As a result, many students are not learning and may not meet state graduation requirements in 2003.

For this reason, a major investment in a different kind of professional development is now underway in Boston. This professional development is ongoing, school based, job embedded, collaborative, and focused on student learning goals. It is helping principals and teachers reorganize their instruction, their time, their student groupings throughout the day, their measurement of student and school progress — in short, the whole school is changing in ways that are leading to more effective instruction and increased student learning.

With the start of the work in the final cohort of schools this fall, every school in Boston now has long-term support to implement whole-school change. According to the outside evaluator, Education Matters, the implementation is having a positive effect on instruction. The evaluator affirms the importance of school-based coaching, which Boston's model provides, and highlights promising examples of deep changes in teacher understanding, classroom instruction, and school organization.

An Analysis of Boston's Professional Development Spending

To follow up on the Task Force's work and to garner more resources for whole-school change, the Boston Public Schools joined forces with the Boston Plan for Excellence-Boston Annenberg Challenge (BPE-BAC) to conduct an in-depth analysis of the district's existing professional development spending in 1998-1999. The findings support the Task Force's conclusion of the need for a districtwide professional development strategy.

In addition to reporting on professional development *spending*, this analysis also considered the district's professional development *activities*. Those activities were compiled and then reviewed in light of two critical elements:

- how closely and directly each activity supported the “Essentials” — what is required of all schools by the district’s Plan for Whole-School Change
- how well each activity matched sound principles for professional development — those of the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT). Those principles, endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers and other professional organizations, are derived from current research on what has proven effective in transforming schools so students meet high standards.

The findings in this study lead unmistakably to the conclusion that, at least for the short term, all professional development activities that are not linked to school-level plans for making teaching more effective and for improving student learning in literacy and math should be dropped.

NPEAT Principles for Effective Professional Development

- 1) Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between (a) actual student performance and (b) goals and standards for student learning.
- 2) Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
- 3) Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
- 4) Most professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving.
- 5) Professional development should be continuous and on-going, involving follow-up and support for further learning — including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
- 6) Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on (a) outcomes for students and (b) the instruction and other processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learned through professional development.
- 7) Professional development should provide opportunities to gain an understanding of the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.
- 8) Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning.

From the National Partnership for Excellence & Accountability in Teaching, September 1998

FINDINGS

- I. **In 1998-99, the Boston Public Schools spent significant funds on professional development for teachers, principals, and headmasters: \$23.5 million or nearly 4% of its total budget. This amounts to almost \$5,000/teacher and principal— a significant commitment of resources. Ultimately, the district may find it needs to increase spending on professional development, but the first step will be to marshal existing dollars.**

The analysis included two unconventional categories of spending: (1) dollars dedicated to teacher time for professional development; and (2) all funding sources, including private funds from the Boston Annenberg Challenge. This analysis did not include four other costs:

- the cost of salary increases for teachers who earn advanced degrees or additional college credits, approximately \$18 million in 1998-99
- the cost of “common planning time” for elementary teachers: student-free periods during the school day that are required to be used for professional development, approximately \$1.6 million in 1998-99
- the cost of “administrative periods” for middle and high school teachers: student-free time during the school day that is assigned at the discretion of the principal or headmaster and may be used for professional development (no estimate of cost)
- other private dollars, which are not reported in a usable format (no estimate of cost)

If these costs had been included, the district’s spending on professional development would have reached almost \$50 million in 1998-99.

- II. **More than \$5 million or 23% of funds spent on professional development in 1998-99 was integrated into implementation of the Plan for Whole-School Change in Cohort I, Cohort II, and Cohort III schools. [Cohort IV began in 1999-00.]**

Hallmarks of this strategy are the following:

1. a focus on instruction as measured by student performance
2. schoolwide planning and collaboration
3. external support with an emphasis on building the capacity of principals and teachers to continue the work
4. regular external review and independent evaluation
5. research-proven design for effective professional development.

III. More than \$18 million or 77% of funds spent on professional development in 1998-99 was not integrated into an overall strategy for implementing standards-based reform.

III.a. In 1998-99, \$8.2 million was paid for teachers to participate in 30 hours of professional development required in the teachers' contract. Each school's principal or headmaster, with little central guidance and no monitoring of that time's use or effectiveness, decided how the 30 hours were used.

The district's commitment to school-based professional development for teachers is consistent with research that suggests it should be primarily school based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching. The research, however, also shows that decisions about professional development should be based on a district's overall student learning goals, and teachers and principals should be accountable for the use of this time and these funds.

In a school with a common vision and strong collaboration, the content of professional development evolves from the agreed-upon goals for student learning on which the principal and teachers are focused. In a school with a high degree of individual teacher autonomy, however, the content of this time is often only loosely connected to student learning goals and the school's plan to reach those goals.

III.b. Of the nearly \$12 million spent by BPS central departments on professional development, most of the spending was highly fragmented, split among 13 departments and covering at least 19 broad topics. Cohort III alone, the central department specifically created to support whole-school change, focused its dollars on literacy and whole-school change.

The topics covered by the district's professional development offerings are many, nineteen in all. While the core topics — reading, writing, math — received the most funds and reflected the district's priorities, many other topics absorbed almost half of the dollars, signifying a lack of focus and a diffusion of effort in solving student learning problems in literacy and math. The report reveals that there was no articulated strategy across departments, nor did departments necessarily coordinate their efforts by topic or approach.

Three central departments each managed more than \$1 million. Curriculum and Instructional Practice (C&I) spent \$2.6 million, mostly on literacy and math-science. Half the dollars supported school-based coaching; the other half supported workshops of short duration. The Center for Leadership Development (CLD) spent half of its \$1.7 million on leadership activities for principals and headmasters, and half on short term-workshops on nine other topics. The Lead Teacher program spent \$1.6 million (\$500,000 of it contract-mandated) and assigned teachers to at least eight different priorities. Finally, the Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) spent \$1.3 million, almost all of which comprised stipends for teachers to coach and work with other teachers.

III.c. BPS central departments spent \$3.9 million on stipends for teachers, often for short-term projects dispersed across many topics.

In addition to the \$8.2 million spent on 30 hours of professional development time for teachers, the district also spent \$3.9 million on stipends for teachers to assume other roles, such as Lead Teachers and Standards Facilitators, or to participate in workshops.

IV. More than half of the district's spending on professional development came from outside funders — federal, state, private — increasing the challenge of strategic coordination and long-range planning.

Half of the district's professional development budget came from federal sources (\$7 million), private sources (\$4.3 million), and the state (\$1.2 million). The use of the federal and state dollars was highly fragmented, and paid for Lead Teachers, teacher stipends, staff salaries, and consultants. The mode of delivery was primarily workshops of one to four sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent with the Task Force Report, the ultimate recommendation of this study is that:

The district should articulate a strategy that establishes philosophy, objectives, and standards for all professional development linked to the overall system goals of improving teaching and learning through whole-school change and should evaluate every available professional development dollar within that strategy.

As part of that effort, the BPS should consider six specific recommendations:

Recommendation: Define professional development principles and a strategy for effective professional development to support implementation of the Plan for Whole-School Change.

Boston's Plan for Whole-School Change was developed by the Superintendent, in collaboration with his staff and external partners, and was based on NPEAT-like principles which were synthesized from many studies about the characteristics of professional development efforts that improve student performance. Using principles such as these explicitly for measuring professional development would help unify leadership in the district and in the schools about the kind of professional development most likely to improve instruction to reach student learning goals. The principles could create a common language and understanding.

The strategy would define the purpose for BPS-sponsored professional development, the primary model for delivering it to accomplish the student learning goals, and the spending levels for each activity. It would also help define the roles of different departments in implementing this strategy.

Recommendation: Center responsibility in one department for all professional development.

The district's ability to dramatically improve student performance in reading and math depends on whether it can refine the nature and quality of its professional development. That cannot be done with many different departments holding responsibility; such a strategy risks even more fragmentation. Nor can it be done without clearing up the ambiguity in the roles of important departments like the CLD and the Lead Teacher office. Someone has to be in charge. The Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning should be responsible and be given the power and the authority to have the penultimate say about all professional development, second only to the Superintendent.

Recommendation: Align professional development resources with the Superintendent's student learning goals and focus spending on fewer topics.

Among the "Essentials" of whole-school change is that each school realign its resources and organization to better support learning in core academic subjects. For its part, the district should undertake the same rigorous review of its professional development resources to better support each school in improving instruction and meeting its student learning goals. That review should consider offerings in light of schools' needs. Research demonstrates that support for teachers as they actually use what they are learning, and that provides opportunities for them to receive feedback on their instruction most directly leads to improvements in student performance.

Recommendation: Reexamine the activities of the Office of Curriculum & Instructional Practice (C&I), the Center for Leadership Development (CLD), the Lead Teacher program, and the Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) to link them to the Superintendent's student performance goals and to school-level efforts to implement whole-school change.

Districts with the most sustained student performance gains have moved away from a professional development approach that stresses the individual control by each teacher of his or her own professional development toward a strategy in which the central office works with each school to budget for and implement a professional development plan customized for that school. These plans typically include professional development for individual teachers, but focus on professional development based on meeting the student learning goals of the school.

Recommendation: Build in more accountability for the quality and focus of professional development, through the Plan for Whole-School Change.

As described in Finding III, professional development centered on changing the whole school's instruction and organization results in highly focused spending and activities. Each of the six "Essentials" leads participants to activities for improving student learning in literacy and math and in meeting explicit student learning goals.

The Plan for Whole-School change builds in school-level accountability in several ways, from visits by cohort directors and deputy superintendents that ask about meeting student learning goals to coaches helping teachers to internalize accountability by reviewing student work and formative assessment data together.

Recommendation: Create a consolidated plan for external funds and integrate them to support the strategy and principles recommended above.

The analysis shows a heavy reliance on federal funds for professional development, and that the state's spending on professional development is small, only one third that of private spending. Boston's federal and state external dollars are particularly fragmented. It has been possible since the last reauthorization of federal ESEA for Boston to work with the state to create a single, consolidated plan for the use of all its federal dollars. From this work should come an increase in state support for Boston's professional development strategy. Having high standards for all students, the state should share responsibility for helping each student meet the challenge through strong instruction.

CONCLUSION

The district's ability to dramatically improve student performance in reading and math depends on whether it can redefine the nature and quality of its professional development. The current standard — in Boston and in Massachusetts as well as everywhere else — for improvements in student performance is standardized test scores. Boston currently uses the Stanford 9, a generic, standardized norm-referenced test, and soon will be using MCAS, also a standardized test, not norm-referenced but rather one specially prepared to align with Massachusetts standards. It is generally regarded as among the most challenging tests now in use.

Research in recent years indicates that there are two means of raising scores: teach to improve the scores, as is currently underway in Chicago, or teach to improve student learning and thereby improve the scores, as is being done in New York's District II. There is also a significant body of research that suggests that focusing on the tests with no plan or approach for making deeper changes in instruction can be counterproductive to long-term improvement. The route to deeper changes in instruction is through professional development that deals with content, pedagogy, and the organization of instruction.

In adopting its model for whole-school change, the Boston Public Schools has adopted the latter course, and is laying the foundation for long-term gains in student learning. The district should be applauded for the ground-breaking work it has done so far to embrace a model for whole-school change and to begin to reorganize around it. Continuing this ambitious effort will require more reorganization of resources and a revolution in thinking. Given the urgency of the need for improved instruction in core subjects of literacy and math and the high stakes for students attached to these subjects, the district will have to focus every available dollar on providing direct, ongoing assistance to teachers and principals in these areas. The district can no longer use its limited dollars for activities, however worthwhile, that do not link to school-level plans for student improvement. ♦