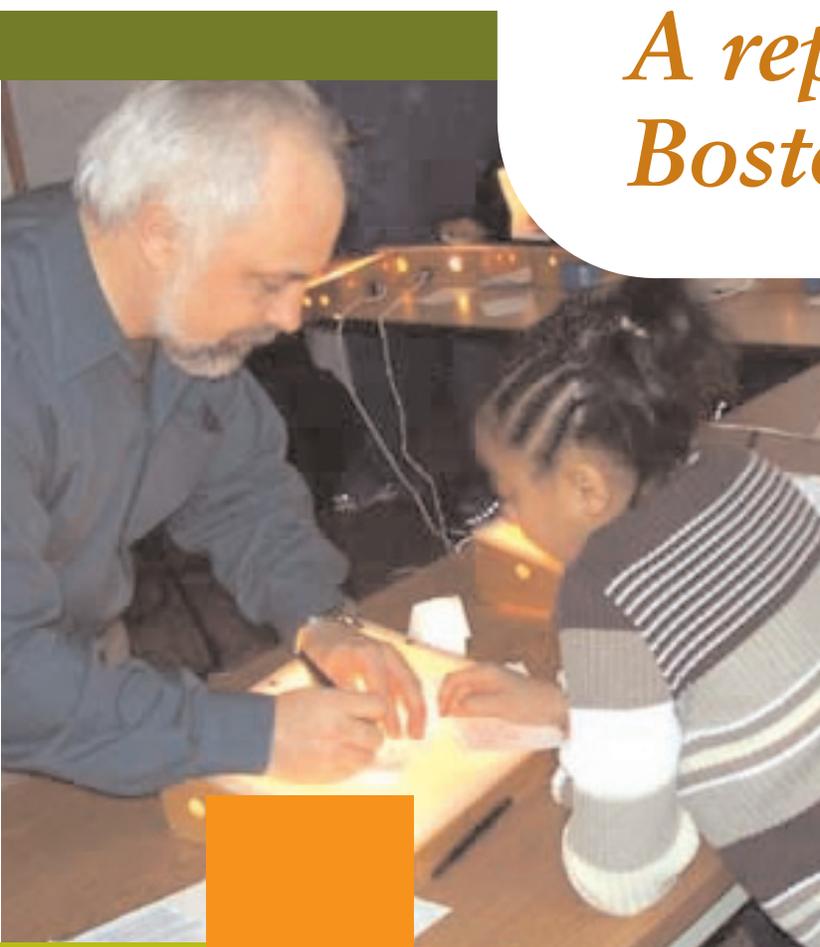


# **Progress and Promise**

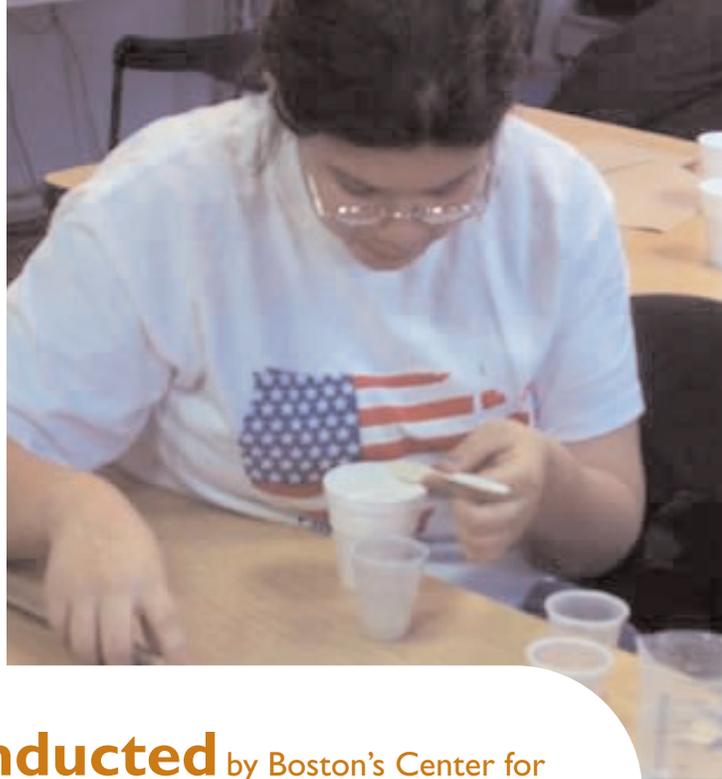
## *A report on the Boston Pilot Schools*



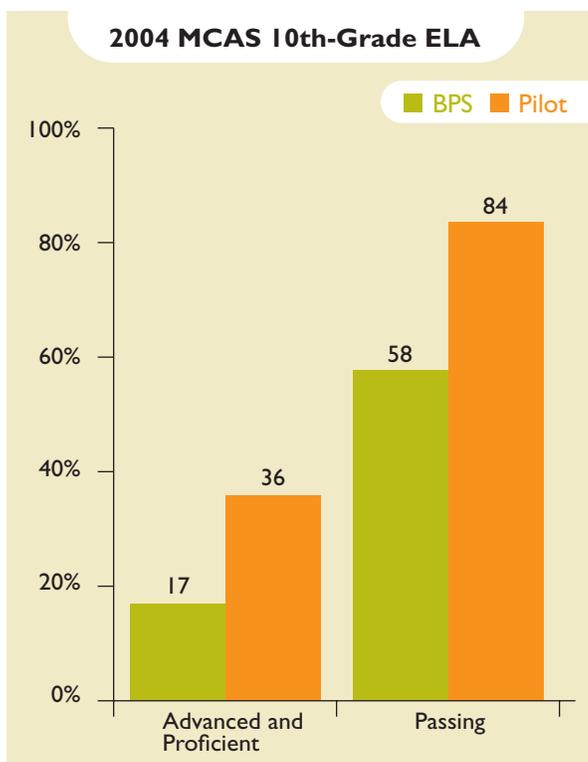
**Executive Summary**  
**January 2006**



Center for  
Collaborative  
Education  
Boston, Massachusetts



**New research conducted** by Boston's Center for Collaborative Education documents significant achievement by students who attend the city's Pilot Schools. Pilot School students are performing better than the district averages across every indicator of student engagement and performance, including the statewide standardized assessment (MCAS). In other standard measures, Pilot School students show better rates of attendance and fewer out-of-school suspensions, and more go on to attend university or technical college after they graduate.

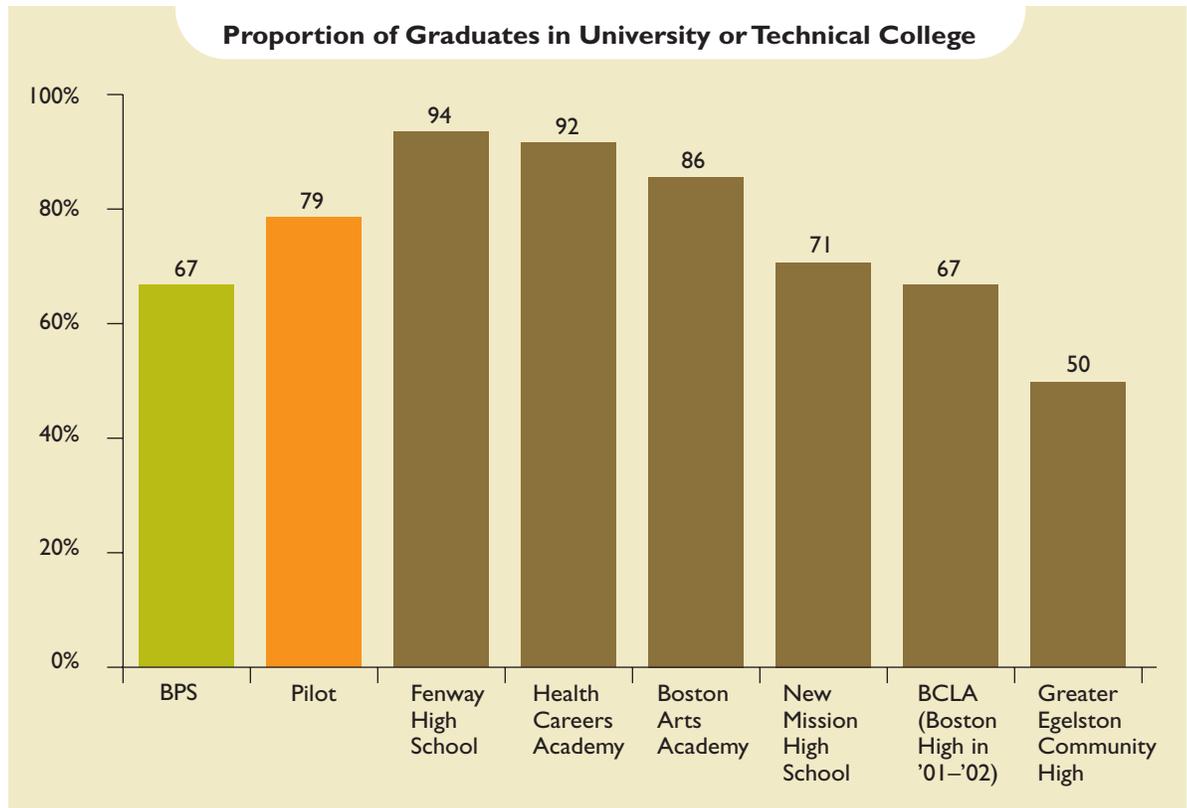


### Key findings of the report<sup>1</sup>

#### Academic Performance

- **Higher performance on the state standardized test—the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)**

When MCAS scores of students at Pilot Schools are compared to BPS averages, Pilot School students consistently score better. For example, 46 percent of the Pilot School fourth graders were rated *advanced* or *proficient* in the grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA) MCAS, compared to 29 percent of BPS students. Math scores were also far apart, with 37 percent of Pilot School fourth-grade students scoring advanced or proficient, compared to 21 percent of BPS students. The percentage of fourth-grade students that received *passing* scores in the math and ELA MCAS tests was also higher in Pilot Schools, although the difference was smaller.



“Our vision is to help every student, when they leave us, to not only get to college, but to get them through college.” — Principal

“I like the [idea] of this school being a college prep [school]. We have a lot more discussions in the classroom, and the teachers involve every student.” — Student

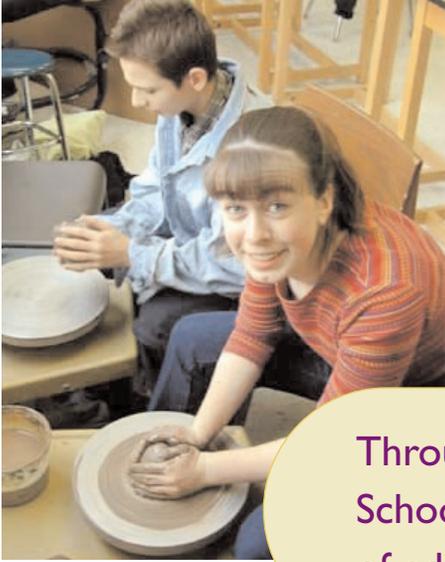
The tenth-grade English Language Arts test showed a particularly wide disparity between Pilot School students and BPS students. On average, 84 percent of Pilot School students passed the test, compared to 58 percent of BPS students. As a proportion, more than twice as many Pilot School students were in the advanced/proficient category as BPS students.

Tenth-grade math MCAS scores were similarly higher than those posted by BPS high schools. 80 percent of Pilot School students passed the tenth-grade math MCAS test, compared to 59 percent of BPS students.

It is noteworthy that the difference in performance between Pilots and BPS schools increased by grade level—so that the largest differences in MCAS performance are at the high school level. This difference is also seen in the engagement indicators of attendance and suspension levels discussed below.

- **Higher college-going rate**

A higher proportion of Pilot School students continue their education at a university or a technical college, as compared to BPS graduates.<sup>2</sup> The average for all Pilot Schools is 79 percent, compared to an average of 67 percent for all BPS graduates. Individual Pilot Schools did far better than the average. For example, 94 percent of students graduating from Fenway High School, a Pilot School, attended university or technical college. One Pilot School, Greater Egleston Community High School, posted a percentage of students going on to university or technical college that was lower than the BPS average—50 percent compared to 67 percent. However, that reflects in part Greater Egleston’s mission, which is to serve students who have previously left or dropped out of other high schools.



Through their choice, commitment, and hard work, Pilot School teachers, students, and families have created models of educational excellence *within* the BPS system.

### **Engagement**

- **Higher attendance rates**
- **Lower suspension rates**
- **Lower in-district and out-of-district transfer rates**

For attendance, elementary Pilot Schools posted a median rate of 97 percent, compared to 96 percent for BPS elementary schools. Pilot middle schools posted a median attendance rate of 97 percent, compared to 94 percent in BPS middle schools. And for high schools, the Pilot School median attendance rate was 95 percent, compared to a BPS high school rate of 89 percent.

For out-of-school suspension rates, BPS elementary schools posted an average of 3 percent, compared to 1 percent for Pilot Schools. Among middle schools, BPS schools posted an average of 14 percent, compared to 12 percent for Pilot Schools. And for high schools, BPS had a rate of 9 percent out-of-school suspensions compared to 5 percent for Pilot Schools.

Boston School Superintendent Thomas Payzant says he is encouraged by the results of the study. “What this report shows is that real progress that can change the lives of students is possible. Pilot Schools have made an invaluable contribution to public education in Boston.” The Pilot Schools have grown and thrived under Payzant’s ten-year stewardship. Payzant points out that many other school systems around the country continue to send observers to Boston to see Pilot Schools, an important part of the Boston Public Schools’ comprehensive pre-K through 12 reform plan.

Richard Stutman, president of the Boston Teachers’ Union, is also proud of the progress Pilot Schools have made. “This report shows that the Pilot model is a vital avenue for teacher growth and innovation. It is important for us that the lessons and best practices learned from Pilots be considered for other schools. It’s exciting to see the progress that has been made by Boston students.”

### **Pilot Schools are Boston Public Schools**

The Pilot Schools—which operate with autonomy within the school district—were created in 1995 through a unique partnership that included the mayor, the office of the superintendent, the school committee, and the teachers’ union. Boston is the only city in the country to create Pilot Schools to serve as models of innovation, with the purpose of identifying “best practices” and sharing

them with public school educators in Boston and beyond. In addition to educating the children who attend them, the Pilot Schools serve as research and development laboratories, creating and assessing strategies that can create success within an urban public school system.

Students in Pilot Schools are on the whole representative of students in the public system with regard to economic status; race and ethnicity; and in the proportion of mainstream special education students attending the schools.<sup>3</sup> As well, over time Pilot Schools are becoming increasingly more representative of students with moderate to severe special needs. The number of Pilot Schools has grown from the first year, when 5 Pilot Schools enrolled about 1.5 percent of the BPS population. Today, 19 schools (pre-K through 12) in Boston use the Pilot School model to serve 5,900 students, or about 10 percent of the public school population.<sup>4</sup> By creating the Pilot Schools—which offer choice, smallness, and accountability—the Boston Public Schools have taken on a national leadership role in urban school reform.

## Key features of Pilot Schools

Although they serve essentially the same student population, Pilot Schools are different from traditional public schools in significant ways. Pilot Schools have far more autonomy over their resources (including budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, and the calendar) in order to best serve their students. While Pilot Schools employ a diversity of educational approaches, they share certain key characteristics. Pilot Schools are:

- **Accountable.** Pilot Schools have developed a set of consistent benchmarks against which performance is evaluated that connect the vision of the particular school to the work done by each student.
- **Small and Nurturing.** Pilot Schools place great emphasis on creating a nurturing school culture in which teachers attend closely to each student's learning needs. Only 2 of the 19 Pilot Schools have more than 500 students, and both of them are organized into multiple small academies.
- **Vision-Driven.** Every Pilot School has created a vision focused on equity and the fundamental belief in every child's potential. This vision shapes the teaching and the work of every member of the school community. Pilot Schools have the power then to hire teachers and staff who can support this vision.

### Five Autonomies:

- Budget
- Staffing
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Governance and Policies
- Schedule

## Pilot Schools use their autonomy to improve teaching and learning

The report emphasizes that Pilot Schools have used their autonomy to create curriculum, assessment, and school structures that support high expectations and achievement. Pilot Schools commit to making time for faculty collaboration and planning—which are crucial for improving a school's culture and performance. With the same per pupil budget as BPS schools, Pilot Schools as compared to the district average have:

- **Low class sizes** (average of 20 in elementary schools and 19 in secondary schools).

## Current Boston Pilot Schools

School Name	Grades Served in 2003–2004
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### Elementary .....

Baldwin ELC	K0 to 1
Samuel Mason School	K0 to 5
Lee Academy	N/A

### Elementary-Middle .....

Lyndon Elementary School	K to 8
Young Achievers	K to 8
Mission Hill School	K to 8
Orchard Gardens Pilot School	K to 8

### Middle .....

The Harbor School	6 to 8
Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School (formerly New Boston Pilot Middle School)	6 to 8

### Middle-High .....

Josiah Quincy Upper School	6 to 10
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### High .....

Fenway High School	9 to 12
Greater Egleston Community High School	ungraded
New Mission High School	9 to 12
Health Careers Academy (Horace Mann Charter)	9 to 12
Boston Arts Academy	9 to 12
Boston Day and Evening Academy (Horace Mann Charter)	ungraded
Boston Community Leadership Academy (BCLA)	9 to 12
Tech Boston Academy	9 to 10
Another Course to College	9, 11, 12

For more information, or to obtain the full report, contact:

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Boston, Massachusetts

- **Low overall student-teacher loads in secondary schools** (average of 55 students per teacher as opposed to well over 100 students per teacher in BPS secondary schools).
- **Long instructional periods.**
- **Significant collaborative faculty planning time**, a key correlate to increased student achievement.
- **A nurturing school culture**, featuring advisories, learning centers, and student support teams.
- **Graduation by demonstrating competency or mastery.** In almost all Pilot Schools, in order to graduate (from eighth or twelfth grades), students must demonstrate mastery of a defined set of skills and content knowledge through a series of assessments. This approach stands in contrast to the traditional standard of qualifying for graduation by course completion and adequate performance on standardized tests.

## The Pilot School strategy has strengthened the Boston Public Schools

Excellent single schools are relatively common, but it is rare for excellence to spread throughout a large urban district. The Pilot School strategy has also led to improvements throughout the Boston Public Schools:

- **The Pilot approach to high school graduation was instrumental in leading to a new BPS graduation policy.** Under the new policy, a high school can choose to propose a unique course sequence and assessment for graduation.
- **The success of the Pilot high schools was an important factor in Superintendent Payzant's recommendation** to the school committee to authorize conversion of four large BPS high schools to small schools sharing space and resources. These new small schools have been granted limited autonomy over their budgets.
- **The Pilot autonomies have informed the use of autonomy in other selected BPS schools.** These schools can seek autonomy from a district policy if the waiver will advance their teaching and learning agendas.

Through their choice, commitment, and hard work, Pilot School teachers, students, and families have created models of educational excellence and innovation *within* the BPS system. They demonstrate that teacher unions and districts working together can make the system stronger and more successful.

1 The study reports on 15 of the 19 schools, leaving out the Early Learning Center, 2 schools that opened in the year studied, and another school that opened in 2004–2005.

2 Survey data on post-secondary participation of 2003 high school graduates was provided by the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) as derived population estimates. Results are displayed as the proportion of graduates who were enrolled in post-secondary education one year after graduation.

3 A primary goal of the Pilot School Network is to serve students representative of BPS as a whole. Representative enrollment has not yet been reached at the elementary level - Pilot elementary schools serve a smaller percent of low-income students and students of color than BPS. However, as new elementary Pilot Schools have opened, Pilot elementary demographics are getting closer to BPS elementary student demographics.

4 Two of the 19 are Horace Mann charter schools in addition to being part of the Pilot School Network. Horace Mann charters are granted autonomy by the state department of education while also remaining part of the district and the teachers' union.