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### If Our Students Fail, We Fail, If They Succeed We Succeed: Case Studies Of Boston Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

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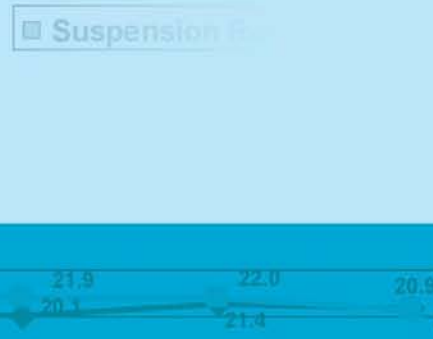
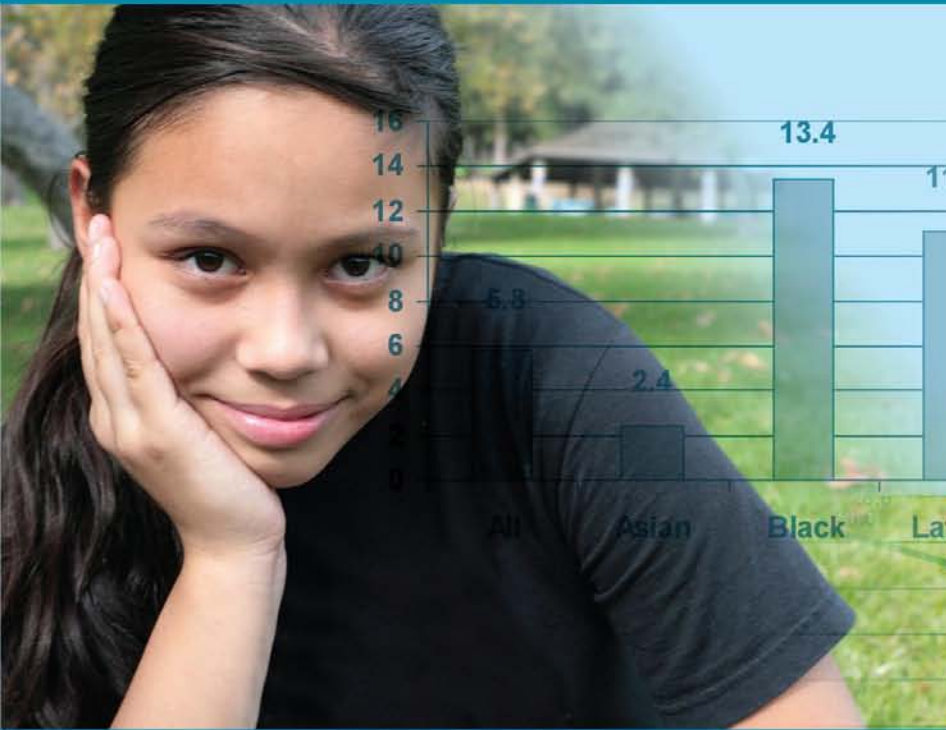
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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for  
Latino Community Development  
and Public Policy



## If Our Students Fail, We Fail, If They Succeed We Succeed

Case Studies Of Boston Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

*by Eileen de los Reyes, David Nieto and Virginia Diez*

**BARR FOUNDATION**

Using KNOWLEDGE, NETWORKS and FUNDING  
to Build a Better Boston for All



# *If Our Students Fail, We Fail. If They Succeed, We Succeed* Case Studies of Boston Schools Where Latino Children Succeed

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# *If Our Students Fail, We Fail. If They Succeed, We Succeed* Case Studies of Boston Schools Where Latino Children Succeed

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by Eileen de los Reyes, David Nieto and Virginia Diez

## *Executive Summary*

This report focuses on the findings of five case studies of Boston schools whose Latino students are succeeding academically. The purpose of the study is to identify the characteristics of schools where Latino students succeed so that it can serve as a guide to educators as they plan for programs directed at these students as well as to parents as they choose educational settings for their children.

***If Our Students Fail, We Fail. If They Succeed We Succeed*** reports on case studies of the Manassah E. Bradley Elementary, the Hugh R. O’Donnell Elementary, the Donald McKay K-8 School, Fenway High School and Tech Boston Academy. MCAS scores provided an initial sample of schools with higher pass rates for Latino students. Two elementary, one middle and two high schools were selected from schools where less than 15% of the Latino students are failed either or both the English Language Arts (ELA) and the Math test, ie they had a pass rate of 85%. The MCAS tests in Grades 4, 8 and 10 were taken into account. The study excludes exam schools and two-way bilingual schools since at this moment they are “too exceptional” in the district and the focus of the study was identifying best practices that could be implemented in the majority of district schools. Two pilot high schools were selected because the gap in MCAS results between these schools and the comprehensive high schools in the district was too wide to justify the selection of any of the latter schools for this project.

## **Question and Method**

The research was guided by the following questions:

- How can academic and social success, as it relates to the education of Latino students, be defined and described?
- What are the characteristics of schools where Latino students succeed?
- What can families, teachers and administrators learn from schools that succeed in educating Latino students?

A team of three researchers visited the school for two days. Headmasters and Principals received our research proposal, agreed to have us visit, and organized our observations and interviews. We focused on five areas: 1) Mission and Vision, 2) School Organization and Decision Making, 3) School Culture and Climate, 4) Curriculum and Instruction and 5) Family and Community Engagement. Methodologically, this study was guided by an “emic” perspective—i.e. we moved with the teachers and administrators to consider schools as they see and experience them. We did not enter the schools with an *a priori* list of best practices for Latinos developed in different schools and different districts expecting to find these Boston schools. Rather, we let the voices and beliefs of the study’s participants come through in the analysis. We submitted each school report back to principals, headmasters and teachers for comments and to ensure the adequate representation of their schools.

## **Findings**

We present our findings as follows: First, we propose a definition of academic and social success. Second, we present the shared strengths of the schools we visited. Third, we discuss an unexpected and critical finding which we describe as the *silences* in schools about the Latino students’ histories, culture and identities. Finally, we offer

our analysis of each of the schools and the best practices which they offer the district as examples of what is possible within the context of the Boston Public Schools.

## 1. Defining and Describing Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

As a result of this research we define and describe schools where Latino students are succeeding academically in the following ways:

- Educational organizations having the *will* and *capacity* to address instructional challenges efficiently and successfully. We define *will* as the ability of groups of people to mobilize around a shared goal or challenge and *capacity* as the organizational infrastructure to implement decisions and solutions.
- Schools which define success/achievement as having a social and an academic component. These schools have a vision of the students' future as engaged members of society and as productive participants in the economy.
- Organizations which are conducive to teachers, staff and administrators being able to identify problems and propose solutions which can be tested, analyzed and revised. This process gives schools a dynamic sense of forward movement that sustains their energy and enthusiasm.
- Schools with a culture which promotes collaboration allowing the organization—teachers, administrators and staff—to leverage their individual and collective knowledge and experiences.
- The school climate balances effectively academic rigor and nurturance addressing the students' academic and socio-emotional needs.
- The school staff understands the context of the families' lives and adjusts to their needs and expectations.
- In successful schools, teachers and administrators take their full share of responsibility for student failure and do not tolerate low expectations for their students' academic outcomes.

## 2. Characteristics Of Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

This section focuses on identifying shared strengths we observed in the schools we analyzed. These may provide a framework for teachers, administrators and families to recognize key areas that promote the academic achievement of Latino students.

### ***School Climate: How Students Experience the School.***

- Affective.*** School climate in all of the schools we examined is nurturing and openly affective. Students see teachers as their protectors, mentors and members of their extended family. Latino students tell us they feel very comfortable having teachers and administrators as members of their families and they like knowing that their teachers are in close contact with their parents. In turn, teachers describe them as hard workers and having great potential. There is reciprocity between teachers and students: their admiration and support for each other generate a climate that is both healthy and productive. There are few if any discipline problems in these schools.
- Developmentally appropriate.*** We observed what we describe as a developmental process by which teacher-student relationships change over time as children develop not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. Children in elementary schools experience a very affective and maternal climate where they are visibly cared for and loved. In middle school we observed students who feel confident in who they are and how they are perceived by the adults, developing their independent voices and articulating powerfully their plans for developing professional identities. In the high schools we observed an environment that is mature and professional. Students are treated as young adults who are expected to behave as if they are in a professional environment. The process of deliberately preparing a learning environment that supports the development of children from elementary to high school—a continuum of developmental support—is worth exploring more as it may be helpful to other schools in the district.
- Physically and socially safe:*** We focused on the hallways. In many schools the hallway experience is a struggle for power between adults and students with teachers disciplining students on how to walk and speak and what to wear or not to wear. In contrast, hallways in the schools we visited are spaces to engage

in conversations. In one school, conversations focused on sports and families while in another the headmaster interrupted meetings with adults to visit with students in the hallways when classes changed. In these schools adults know each student's name and at least something about their lives, which makes their short exchanges meaningful and relevant. In all of these schools the hallways were relaxed places where Spanish and other languages were spoken freely. The sense of safety in the classrooms and the teachers' enthusiasm for learning put us, and we assume students as well, in a great disposition to learn.

### ***School Takes Responsibility for Promoting Academic and Social Success***

- a. **Failure is not an option.** There are no "excuses" for having students fail, we were told by one principal, and "We don't play the blame game" was the mantra of a group of teachers. Their stubborn determination to have students succeed in the face of countless challenges generates a culture that is intensely focused on the students' academic and social success. Latino students believe they are included in these schools' culture of achievement. Listening to Latino students construct a narrative of success in schools and in life was inspiring, especially while confirming that these students are aware that other Latinos who are just like them experience failure and neglect in other schools in the district.
- b. **Learning is exciting.** All subjects are taught in ways that actively engage students. Teachers exude confidence and structure classroom space with the needs of their students in mind; they create an environment that feels safe and predictable. We would characterize these classrooms as nurturing, safe, fun and intensely focused on content. In elementary schools, classrooms are colorful and child-centered with furniture, signs and materials appropriate to their ages. In high schools, classrooms resemble office spaces designed to promote collaboration and professionalism. Bulletin boards provide guidance in the academic subjects as well as reminders of acceptable behaviors.
- c. **Encourage collaboration.** In all of the schools we visited students knew how to work individually and collectively. The support Latino children give each other by translating instructions, supporting newcomers and pushing each other with their academic work should be examined as it expands the concept of collaboration to include the strengths of bilingualism and biculturalism.
- d. **High expectations.** Principals/headmasters, teachers and staff have a clear social vision for their students. Educators are preparing students for higher education and for professional careers. Teachers and administrators are cognizant of the obstacles facing Latinos and African American youth but these do not diminish in any way their aspirations for their students. The expectation is that all adults will keep working as hard as is necessary to have students succeed. Societal obstacles such as racism and poverty frame the challenges these educators face yet in these schools we witnessed a contagious conviction and determination that what they were attempting collectively was possible.

### ***Refocusing the Problem: School Has a Positive and Empathetic Understanding of Latino Families***

The third building block supporting the academic and social success of Latino students is a positive and empathetic view of Latino families. Teachers and administrators at the schools we visited see Latino families as being engaged in their children's education. They are acutely aware that families are working many jobs and may be having a hard time making ends meet. They recognize that immigrant Latino families face additional challenges such as understanding a new culture and language. Facilitating these families' engagement with their children's education is seen as the responsibility of the school.

- ***School Organization and School Culture Support Learning***
  - a. **School Organization and School Culture: Reciprocity Between Faculty and Administrators.** A striking characteristic of all the schools we visited is the relation of the principal/headmaster with the faculty. These are schools where organizational roles are clear and where there is a mutually beneficial relationship between administrators and faculty. The principals/ headmasters describe their roles (and the faculty concurs with their descriptions), as providing the necessary resources and stability for teachers to do their work successfully. Teachers see the principals/headmasters as their supporters, trusting their leadership in the building and in the district. Principals/headmasters recognize the teachers' expertise in the areas of

curriculum and instruction, and they follow and support the teachers' recommendations. When disagreements emerge, the faculty and the principals/headmasters report that they engage in dialogue and treat each other as professionals who share the same educational goals. Dialogue between the principals/headmasters and teachers is collegial and respectful, generating harmony conducive to collaboration throughout the building. In turn, collaboration generates consistency in the academic areas and in the school's climate and culture, as well as safety to learn from experience and change institutional practices to adapt to new realities.

- b. School Culture.** A collaborative culture that is supportive and safe characterizes faculty relations. Making mistakes and asking questions are very much part of the culture of these schools. Teaching is understood to be a complex process requiring knowledge, experience and collaboration. They feel confident in their teaching abilities and are willing and able to deploy individual and collective resources to address new instructional challenges. Powerful and confident teachers generate safety and predictability in the classroom. In a safe and predictable classroom teachers are able create the conditions for a community of learners to emerge.

- **Vision and Mission.**

Two of the schools in our sample are pilot schools. We were impressed by the level of alignment between these schools' mission and vision and the school's organization, culture, climate and instruction. All members of these schools' communities use the mission and vision to describe their social and academic lives at the school. Latino students in both schools define and describe their experiences at these schools using the language provided by their school's vision and, in particular, their school's mottos. We interpreted this to mean that students feel very much part of the ethos of their schools.

### 3. An Unexpected Finding: Understanding the Silences

In spite of the evident accomplishments, we were perplexed to find ourselves in "colormute" schools (Pollock, 2004). In these schools Latino identity was not underscored or evidently displayed. When asked to reflect on Latino students, teachers and administrators became visibly uncomfortable. We received answers that immediately shifted the focus away from Latinos: "Latino students are supported because of what we do for all students here"; or "We don't put kids into categories. They're kids." When we asked, "What's working for Latinos?" The response was, "We treat all students the same" or, alternatively, "Every student is different." In one school where the highest percentage of the student population was Latino the interviewee mentioned the presence of African American and Arabic students at the school to suggest that questions focusing on Latinos were inappropriate. When asked about the discomfort with questions about Latino students, two teachers were insightful in their responses. One explained, "There is a reluctance to think of students as belonging to an ethnic group, e.g., "Latinos," because we don't want to make assumptions. The school attempts to meet students where they are." This is a complex statement which may be interpreted to mean that the assumptions may be negative or it could be that the school's intense focus on the individual does not require knowledge about the students' cultural backgrounds. Another teacher contributed an even more complex answer, "As a white man, I'm reluctant to speak of everyone as a group because, as a society, we have moved away from that."

The fact that not all is well under this artificially-imposed silence finally became apparent at one school where students began to fill the void we were sensing. In a discussion about curriculum, a group of Latino students were befuddled about how teachers at their school did not seem to teach issues that were directly relevant to them. One student said, "We have been taught about Chinese migration. Why not Latino migration?" Another student continued, "People should be aware of where they come from, how they struggled, and how they are being deported." This student's statement may be a beginning point to show that even schools that are looking at history and/or current events from the point of view of workers and minorities may fall short if they do not make their curriculum relevant to the lives of the students who are actually in the classroom.

Research by Marcelo and Carola Suarez Orozco (2001) points out that Latino students self esteem is diminished the longer they are in U.S. schools and that this contributes to their depressed academic outcomes. Teachers' accounts

of the “silences” support this observation. One teacher reported that, “as they [Latinos] move along in school, they feel worse about themselves” and recommends that there “...should be intervention groups and family and community support.” Our research points to a tentativeness—even reluctance—to underscore the universality of culture in shaping child development as well as the uniqueness of Latino culture in shaping the lives of Latino children and their families. Yet, there is now a body of scholarly work that demonstrates how cultural variation in childrearing and teaching practices impacts learning and adjustment in different cultural communities. This body of knowledge would resonate with teachers who work with Latino students and their families and may give them a language to talk about race and ethnicity in their schools and classrooms.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**1. An ethic of caring.** The experience of these schools confirms the analysis of Nel Noddings about schools that adopt an “ethic of caring” or a “relational ethic”. This ethic emerges from relationships between administrators and teachers and between teachers and students that aim at promoting the growth of those who are cared for, not only their academic success. In an environment that has an ethic of caring, those who receive the care feel it. Students are treated with respect and consideration, teaching moments are used as caring occasions, there is abundant dialogue and teachers are willing to spend additional time with students.

**2. One school at a time.** The unique pathways that each school has taken to its success with Latino students recall the work of Nieto and of Barth when they argue that educational reform can only happen in schools—one school at a time. Blueprints of reform that do not take into account the uniqueness of each school’s structure, goals and human dimensions is not viable. The potential for transformation in schools resides within.

**3. A place to begin.** Through the work we have done with five schools in the district we hope to contribute a vision of a destination, or at least an intermediate state, that other schools may use in re-thinking and implementing new strategies. The rubric we used to conduct this research provides schools with an excellent tool to engage in a thorough process of self-assessment with a specific focus on the education of Latino students. [See Appendix 2]

**4. At the root.** The teachers and principals we interviewed are clear that the root causes of poor educational outcomes are the schools (organization, culture and climate), the curriculum and instruction and the lack of resources—not the supposed inherent deficits of Latino students or their families. It seems to us that the reason these schools succeed in educating their students is that teachers and administrators define the problem in a manner that gives them the power to resolve it. Because they are able to see that part of the problem is in their school, they can identify the source and address it; because they can see that part of the problem is in the curriculum, they can revise, supplement or redesign it; and because they understand the problems generated by lack of resources they are empowered to seek out partnerships with organizations and identify potential donors. The reward for these schools’ hard work is a sense of collective competence and pride in knowing that they are giving their students a fair chance to succeed academically and socially.

**5. The absence of Latino educators.** In all but one of the schools we visited, the number of Latino administrators, teachers and staff is very small. In some instances there is one Latino staff member and no Latino teachers. At others, Latino teachers are a small minority of the teaching staff, despite the high number of Latino students at the school. The result is that Latino families searching for support from Latino personnel often overwhelm the few who are able to help them. Most importantly, instructional dialogues focused on the education of Latino students are devoid of the knowledge and input of Latino faculty and administrators. This will continue to generate critical gaps in the relation between schools and Latino students and their families.

**6. The spaces of silence.** The same students who discussed the cultural gaps in the curriculum at the Bradley, O’Donnell, McKay, Fenway and Tech Boston with such eloquence described their school and their teachers as their protectors: “They have our backs.” This level of trust is creating the conditions for these students’ success. But the culture of “silence” interferes with even greater successes. The challenge for schools in the district is to gain the historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge necessary to deepen their understanding of this population and to



incorporate this knowledge in the curriculum and in their relations with Latino students and their families. Deepening the education of Latinos in the district will require that teachers and administrators fill the spaces of silence with the research done thus far on Latino education in the United States. Schools in the district need to become culturally competent in dealing with one third of its student population.

**7. Cultural competence** requires a deep, professional knowledge about the histories of the Latin American nations present at their school and make connections between this new knowledge and instruction. Exploration of research on Latino children and adolescent development will provide a framework for deepening the schools' understanding and effectiveness with this population. Additionally there is growing literature on the contribution of Latinos in the United States. By addressing these areas, schools will strengthen and deepen their commitment to being a diverse, socially involved and morally responsible community of learners.

Our recommendations address fundamental areas that will need to be examined if schools are to succeed in educating Latino students: 1) filling the spaces of silence with research on Latino education; 2) infusing instructional dialogues and strengthening relations with Latino families with the knowledge and input of experienced and proven Latino faculty and administrators; 3) shifting from a deficit to a strength perspective. This requires transforming negative beliefs and perceptions into a positive and empowering approach that builds on Latino students' already existing academic and social strengths. This transformation is hard work as it asks that teachers and administrators carefully examine their core assumptions and subtle biases. It is also contingent upon knowing and understanding the students' families, their histories, their strengths and weaknesses and the specific contributions they can make to school and community. Moreover, each one of these fundamental areas requires paying attention to the school as a whole and transforming structures, curriculum, instruction and relations. We are fully aware of the challenge of transforming whole schools. However, by examining five schools in the district—the Bradley, O'Donnell, McKay, Fenway and Tech Boston—we hope to have provided concrete evidence that change is possible and success attainable in the Boston Public Schools.

# If Our Students Fail, We Fail. If They Succeed, We Succeed

## Case Studies of Boston Schools Where Latino Children Succeed

### Introduction

The research in this report is the qualitative component of the project titled *Better Information for Better Choices for Latino Children and Parents in the Boston Public Schools* conducted by the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at UMass Boston. Two main objectives guide the Mauricio Gastón project: (1) gaining a better understanding of the situation of Latino children in the Boston Public Schools and (2) disseminating this information to a broad set of audiences, with special attention to that which supports the participation of Latino parents in the education of their children.

The qualitative component of the research project focuses on five schools whose Latino students are succeeding academically as measured by scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). We chose two elementary schools, one middle school and two high schools. By choosing schools where Latino students have the highest academic achievement as measured by the MCAS, we are not supporting the notion that these standardized tests are the best possible approach to measuring the academic achievement of students. We recognize the serious limitations of these assessments, in particular for Latino students and English Language Learners (Cummins, 2000; Martínez Alemán, 2006). Yet at this historical moment in Massachusetts, the conversation about academic achievement is bounded within the confines of the MCAS. For students and their families who understand the stakes involved in passing or failing the MCAS, these assessments have become a “limit situation.”<sup>1</sup> We begin our discussion of academic achievement where students, families, teachers and administrators are, and from within these boundaries we move with them to create a space of possibility for Latino students and their families.

The research questions were:

1. How can academic and social success, as it relates to the education of Latino students, be defined and described?
2. What are the characteristics of schools where Latino students succeed?
3. What can families, teachers and administrators learn from schools that succeed in educating Latino students?

The criteria for selecting the five schools were as follows:

- We chose schools where Latino students have the highest academic achievement as measured by the MCAS.
- Exam schools were not included in the sample for selection of schools.
- Two elementary, one middle and two high schools were selected from schools where 60% of Latino students are in the Advanced and Proficient categories in the MCAS—both in English Language Arts (ELA) and in Math and less than 15% are Failing (both in ELA and in Math). The MCAS tests in Grades 4, 8 and 10 were taken into account.
- Two-way bilingual schools were not included since at this moment they are “too exceptional.” The focus of the study was to identify best practices that could be implemented in the majority of district schools.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of limit situations see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. NY: Continuum, 1993. Chapter 3. Freire explains, “In this situation, humans are unable to transcend the limit — situations to discover that beyond these situations — and in contradiction to them — lies an *untested feasibility*.” The MCAS may very well be functioning as a limit to the imagination and creativity of educators in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessments creating a very narrow space within which to think about the education of Latino students and English Language Learners.

- The gap in MCAS results between the two pilot high schools in our sample and the comprehensive high schools in the district was too wide to justify the selection of any of the latter schools for this project. Manassah E. Bradley Elementary, Hugh R. O'Donnell Elementary, Donald McKay-K-8

Using these criteria and with results from 2005-2006 we identified the following schools:

School	% Latino Students	% Latino Advanced & Proficient		% Latino Failing		CPI ELA	CPI Math
		ELA	Math	ELA	Math		
Manassah E. Bradley Elementary	46.6	77	48	0	0	86.5	84.4
Hugh R. O'Donnell	64.8	55	30	0	10	68.8	72.7
Donald McKay K-8	90.9	57	61	3	9	66.1	66.8
Fenway High School	27.7	58	47	8	5	85.2	80.5
Tech Boston Academy	29.3	55	41	0	15	80.6	67.4

Note: For the Bradley and the O'Donnell, 4<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS results were used; for the McKay, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade was used

The MCAS scores provide us with an initial and superficial insight into a school. We recognize that families are looking for more than good results in the MCAS. Through a holistic and in-depth investigation of each of these schools we sought to produce a more comprehensive and multifaceted definition and description of the concept of academic achievement as it relates to Latino students. Academic achievement cannot be explained by looking at one variable or one strategy. Instead, we believe that it results from the interactions of key variables, making it necessary for us to look at whole schools and focus on the complex web of interactions taking place daily. This report is structured around the in-depth examination of five areas: 1) Mission and Vision, 2) Organization and Decision Making, 3) School Culture and Climate, 4) Curriculum and Instruction and 5) Family and Community Engagement.

We hope that this research project will begin a sustained and effective process of defining a plan of action focused on improving the academic achievement of Latino students; this is an urgent need requiring immediate action. The analysis of the district's MCAS results for Latino students shows that in 2005 for 10th grade ELA, 63% of Latino students were in the Needs Improvement and Failing categories, 22% were in the Proficient category and only 5% were Advanced. The situation for English Language Learners in the district was equally challenging, as an astonishing 86% remained in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories. The percentage of Advanced scores for students with LEP (Limited English Proficiency) for 2005 was 0. The generalized low scoring on the MCAS points to a systemic problem which must be recognized and addressed. It is no longer possible to blame Latino students and their families for this systemic academic failure.

Teachers and administrators often view research with skepticism. They wonder if research conducted elsewhere by researchers unfamiliar with the district has any relevance to their work. Families also view research as unnecessarily complicated and unhelpful. This work seeks to speak with teachers, administrators and families about their current challenges in the BPS in a voice that is familiar yet critical, about findings that are clear and useful. We seek to impact one district—the BPS—at the level of effective teaching and learning of Latino students. The impact is therefore specific to the BPS in terms of its contribution. Our expectation is that other districts facing the challenge of successfully educating Latino students will find in the methodology and findings guidance that is appropriate and useful in other schools and classrooms.

Doing research in the BPS is difficult. Principals and teachers are working long hours with limited resources and facing overwhelming challenges. More problematic is the culture of distrust of researchers. We recognize that this distrust is most often than not based on prior experiences with researchers. Our hope is that we present schools with a positive and generous analysis of their organizations and their work, providing them with an outsider's understanding of how they operate, their sources of strengths, and how to build upon them. Senge (1990) explains that teachers and administrators are part of the "lacework" and, because of this, find it is "doubly hard to see the whole pattern of change" (p. 2). By becoming partners with schools, researchers may contribute a vision of the

whole and identify possibilities for how each school's challenges may be addressed. Conversely, by partnering up with researchers, schools may share their successes with others in the district.

Our research is positive and strength-based for three reasons:

1. **It is difficult if not impossible to build on failure and areas of weakness.** Furthermore, *all* schools have sources of strength and potential for growth. Therefore we find it is possible to build on clearly identified areas of strength.
2. **It is difficult if not impossible to learn and improve in an environment of constant criticism.** Defensiveness and resentment are powerful obstacles to change. In many schools we heard that praise is rare and criticism and neglect abundant. Change will not happen in this environment.
3. **Teachers and administrators *do not* want to fail.** At the same time, they may be unable to see how and where they can transform their situation. Researchers may offer important contributions in working *with* schools to create the conditions for students, teachers and administrators to succeed.

This research project is the beginning of what we hope is a long-term process of research, reflection and action to improve the education of Latino students. Many questions remain. For example, the education of Latino students with Individualized Education Plans is an area requiring further study. Examining why three of the schools in our sample are from East Boston may be of value as it may provide us with new insights about positive connections between schools and their surrounding neighborhoods. We were also intrigued by the cultural connections that teachers who are immigrants create with Latino students. More work is required to understand the participation of Latino families in schools. This research is particularly difficult as families are overburdened by jobs and responsibilities and may have difficulty participating. For us the critical question resulting from this research is: how may the history, culture and language of Latinos in the United States be included in the curriculum of all schools in the district? We hope that in-depth research is done in this fundamental area.

Methodologically, this study was guided by an “emic” perspective—i.e. we moved with the teachers and administrators to consider schools as they see and experience themselves. We did not enter the schools with an *a priori* list of best practices for Latinos developed in different schools and different districts expecting to find these Boston schools. Rather, we let the voices and beliefs of the study's participants come through in the analysis. What they did not use as a frame of reference (for example, the students' countries of origin) we don't include in our discussion. We hope to reflect the daily lives of these schools as close to their reality as possible. We submitted each school report back to principals, headmasters and teachers for comments and to ensure the adequate representation of their schools. In this manner we hope to begin the dialogue where schools are at in hopes of imagining together where they could be.

As researchers we were energized by our visits to the Bradley Elementary School, the O'Donnell Elementary School, the McKay School (K-8), Fenway High School and Tech Boston Academy. We recognize their hard work and hope to continue engaged with them as they take the next steps in improving the education of Latino students. Understanding and observing these schools' best practices is accessible to schools district wide. We hope that the sharing of best practices and the excitement of grassroots solutions for grassroots problems energizes schools.

## Background

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When a growing number of residents in the city of Boston consistently fail academically and find themselves with few if any options for employment, all residents feel the impact. The economic, political and social fabric of the city deteriorates as an increasing number of residents have limited access to an education that leads to productive employment and active participation in democracy. According to Jones (2002), “Latinos now represent 14.4% of the population of Boston, an increase of 3.7 percentage points and the largest gain of any group. Non-Hispanic whites

are no longer the majority of Bostonians. Boston has the largest population of Latinos in Massachusetts and in the New England states.” The economic picture is not encouraging. As of 2003, Latinos had the highest rate of poverty in Metro Boston (27% vs. 6% for the non-Latino white population) (McCardle, 2004). An analysis by gender shows that “a little less than 7% of males in the general population are below the poverty line compared to 17% of Latinos. In the general population, 9.8% of women are below the poverty line compared with 23.1% of Latina women” (Borges, Lavan, & Jones, 2006). In terms of employment opportunities, Latinos are extremely overrepresented in low-paying jobs and most underrepresented in high-paying professions such as healthcare, science, engineering, computers, management, business and finance (Borges-Mendez & Uriarte, 2003).

Breaking the cycle of poverty for Latinos requires rethinking how BPS students are educated, as it is only through education that this generation will be able to aspire to a better life. What is required is a long-term, coherent and systematic educational plan that will interrupt Latinos’ journey into poverty and despair. We do not underestimate the task ahead and recognize that this project is but a beginning in what will be a long and difficult process of recovery.

The breadth and depth of academic failure for Latino students signals the need for a comprehensive analysis of successful schools, as these schools provide models of what is possible in the district. Teachers and administrators in the district will be cognizant of the differences between the schools we studied and their own and able to recognize the similarities generated by being in the same district and operating under similar overarching political, economic and social conditions. The shared context, which results in similar challenges and possibilities, should create a space for dialogue across schools interested in addressing the root causes of the academic failure of Latino students in the district.

For Latino families in the district, selecting schools and making sense of their children’s education is critical if they are to create new possibilities for their children. These families need to be able to draw informed comparisons against a framework that defines and describes the characteristics of schools that have proven to succeed in educating Latino students. It is through the alliance of schools and families that new ways of teaching Latino youth will be created.

The premise guiding our research is that teachers and administrators in the BPS have the will and capacity to reverse the trend of academic failure for Latino students. We define will as the ability of groups of people to mobilize around a shared goal or challenge and capacity as having the structural and organizational infrastructure to implement decisions and solutions. Like Paredes Scribner (1999) in *Lessons from High-Performing Hispanic Schools: Creating Learning Communities*,<sup>2</sup> we believe that, “the disjuncture between the traditional mission of schools and the plight of linguistically and culturally diverse students need not exist” (p. 169). The challenge ahead is to provide teachers, administrators, families and communities with concrete and relevant examples of schools and classrooms where Latino students are succeeding academically and socially.

The vulnerabilities of Latino students have been widely documented by numerous studies. Latino students often experience inappropriate and poor instruction, with an unchallenging curriculum and low expectations from the school environment, resulting in deep feelings of alienation and a severe lack of self-esteem. Schools also lack effective strategies to make parents part of the educational process, increasing the risk of dropping out. Finally, students are assessed based exclusively on standardized testing, which has led to curricular development that is focused almost exclusively on preparing for these tests, often at the expense of Latino students’ needs (Paredes Scribner, 1999; Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Crawford, 1989; Moll, 2001). Additionally, the shortage of teachers who share the students’ cultural identity results in instructional and social disconnection, making these students’ adjustments to the new system of education a confusing and frustrating journey that often ends in failure. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to provide legislators, educators, administrators, families and communities with relevant examples of successful schools.

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<sup>2</sup> This study was undertaken in the fall 1993 at the University of Texas at Austin. It was conducted in Region One Education Service Center in Texas and included three elementary schools, three middle schools and two high schools.

Our analysis focuses on the population of Latino students attending public schools in Boston, including those whose first language is Spanish and those whose native language is English. In this literature review we examine the research that informs our work in the areas of culture and language, school culture and climate, instruction and family and community engagement. Although we entered these schools with a clear understanding of the literature and what has been found to work for Latino students nationwide, we remained open to the new ideas, processes and strategies which schools in the BPS have used successfully.

## 1. Understanding the Latino Journey

The process by which immigrant Latino students learn to read their new country and adapt to what they perceive as their place in society and in schools reveals how they come to realize and accept that academic success is out of their reach. Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco (2002), find that:

*...immigrant children enter the United States with very positive attitudes toward education. But these attitudes cannot be maintained in a climate of insurmountable obstacles, cultural hostilities, identity threats, and psychological disparagement. Under such circumstances most children will not continue to invest in schools as a way of moving socially. Indeed, when facing toxic levels of cultural violence, children will tend to spend much of their psychic energy defending against these assaults on their sense of self. (p. 95)*

Within a relatively short period of time, recently arrived Latino youth develop “a keen eye for discerning the place of race and color in the U.S. status hierarchy” (p. 98). Herein lies the root cause of the Latino failure in schools which is not, as many believe, an issue of immigration or language. Instead, research identifies a more complex problem which needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Nieto (2001) summarizes the problem:

*Most recommendations for addressing the academic failure of Latino students have neglected to acknowledge that Latino students who do not speak Spanish also have a high level of academic failure. In a word, most solutions offered for the problems of Latino students in U.S. schools have failed to acknowledge that the major problem is not that they speak Spanish (many do not), but that their identities as Latinos are dismissed as resources in the development of their literacy. (p. ix)*

Believing that being a Latino in the United States and in urban schools—whether an English speaker or a Spanish speaker—is inextricably linked with academic failure traps students in a downward spiral with no hope for success. Students’ perceptions of their reality are correct as the data supports their pessimistic view of the future. To make the case that failure is not inevitable, teachers and administrators need to first understand the process by which Latinos learn to read their context and make choices and then provide them with concrete evidence that instead of the academic failure they expect, the opposite is possible.

There are schools in Boston with missions and expectations that reflect an understanding of the needs and hopes of students, families and community members. Students in schools such as these are seeing daily the academic success of their peers and have come to believe that this, too, could be their future. Understanding how teachers and administrators construct a credible counter-narrative of success—where Latino students see themselves as successful professionals and contributing members of their communities and the society at large—is critical for the district and for the city of Boston.

## 2. The Role of Culture and Language

Culture and language provide Latino students with the framework for understanding, misunderstanding or rejecting what is being taught in schools and classrooms. Darder (2001) explains: “Culture embodies meaningful collective knowledge about how communities have struggled, made history, live their present and envision their future” (p. 129). She adds, “Language is one of the most powerful transmitters of culture...both conveying and reinforcing the rules for community as these relate to collective notions of identity and history” (p. 129). In other words, culture and language provide Latino youth with foundational knowledge that guides them in making sense of their world and

their education. To be successful academically, students require opportunities to connect their language, culture and experiences—their prior knowledge—with the new knowledge that is being taught (Crawford, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

Even with extensive research that continues to confirm the need to link a student’s language, culture and experiences (prior knowledge with new knowledge), the process in countless classrooms is the complete opposite. For many Latino students, the process of acculturation involves the painful and confusing process of understanding that for many teachers and administrators, the students’ culture, language and prior knowledge are at best irrelevant and at worst detrimental to their learning. They intuit that there is a logic trap: if you are Latino and poor, then you are culture-less, language-less and knowledge-less. The disconnection between prior meaning and new knowledge leaves students and teachers without any foundational knowledge upon which to build. The educational journey begins from ground zero, resulting in frustration and failure for both students and teachers.

### 3. School Culture and Climate

Each school in the BPS is a unique system. Adults in each of these systems contribute to creating a unique culture and climate. Senge (1990) helps us understand why those in the system may have difficulty seeing and understanding how the system works: because teachers and administrators are part of the “*lacework*,” they find it is “*doubly hard to see the whole pattern of change*” (p. 2).

Successful schools have a culture that supports reflection and analysis at all levels and, whenever necessary, informs change. Schools where there is a healthy and vibrant culture and climate generating the conditions for the academic success of students may be described as “*learning organizations*,” which are places “*where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it*” (Senge, 1990, p. 2). It is in the “*invisible fabric*” of relations and actions that we may find the key to understanding what is necessary for Latino students to succeed academically.

When analyzing school culture and climate we look at “*the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways*” (McBrien & Brandt, 1997, p. 89). Schools that excel at educating Latino students have knowledgeable teachers and staff who understand their needs and aspirations, culture, language and experiences. These teachers, staff and administrators may be deployed across different teams and organizations so as to maximize the school’s knowledge about these students. Knowledgeable discussion about Latino students permeates the organization, making it understandable and accessible for Latino students and their families. Researchers have identified these as necessary elements in a successful culture and climate conducive to academic success (Heath, 1983; Villegas, 1992).

We make the distinction between school culture and climate as follows: “*school climate refers mostly to the school’s effects on students, while school culture refers more to the way teachers and other staff members work together*” (McBrien & Brandt, 1997, p. 89). If there is a school culture that is knowledgeable about the school’s Latino student population and able to utilize this knowledge effectively, then the school climate should impact students positively. This positive impact may be observed in classrooms and student organizations as well as in formal and informal relationships between adults and students and among students. Students may shed light on what they find important and positive about their school’s climate and how they are making connections between school climate and instruction.

### 4. Curriculum and Instruction

When families and communities have a culture and language different from the school, then the curriculum and pedagogy need to provide effective, cognitive bridges that make learning possible. The need to make explicit instructional linkages between knowledge generated in the family and community and in schools has been explored extensively (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Darder, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Trueba, 1999). The challenge facing teachers and administrators is how to create these bridges effectively. Of course, this requires that teachers and

administrators recognize that Latino families and communities provide students with useful “*funds of knowledge*”—knowledge found in working-class Latino families which can be used as foundational knowledge for instruction (Moll, 2001, 2005).

The concept of *culturally appropriate education* is particularly relevant for analyzing schools and classrooms where Latino students are succeeding academically, as it speaks directly to the idea of providing students with the cultural and linguistic linkages necessary to make sense of what is being taught. Succinctly put: “*Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning*” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161). Ladson-Billings credits a pedagogy with cultural relevance when it meets the following criteria: “(a) *students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order*” (p. 160). With this approach in mind, she also emphasizes that schools should hold the authentic belief that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are competent learners, and that they should put into practice a set of effective practices to meet the social and academic needs of those culturally diverse students. Gay (2000) adds that culturally relevant pedagogy uses “*the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective [for students].... It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming*” (p. 29).

Teachers who adopt a culturally appropriate education re-evaluate their own ideological approaches to teaching and learning adapting their techniques to their students’ needs, not forcing their students into prefixed technical categories of instruction. Teaching then cannot be understood as a mechanical process where teachers implement blindly prescribed theories, methods and techniques (Bartolomé, 1994).

We examine how the curriculum and pedagogy make the instructional linkages that appear to be necessary for Latino students to succeed academically. Culturally appropriate pedagogy involves the use of strategies, techniques and approaches that teachers may use to link the students’ cultural and linguistic background with new knowledge. Yazzie-Mintz (1999), in her research on Native classrooms, defines culturally appropriate curriculum as “*materials that link traditional or cultural knowledge originating in Native home life and community to the curriculum of the school in order to foster academic participation...*” (p. 82).

Analysis of schools where Latinos succeed academically confirms the relevance of culturally appropriate education. Scribner and Reyes (1999) find that schools where Latino students were successful share these characteristics:

**Learning conditions:** schools take home/community conditions, classroom/learning conditions, and assessment conditions as a required knowledge requisite.

**Cultural elements:** artifacts, values, beliefs/assumptions, and expectations are respected and the school is responsive to such cultural needs.

**Building capacity to succeed:** disciplines such as systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared visions, and team learning are developed.

**Implementing best practices:** schools are open to innovation and they seek community and family involvement, collaborative governance and leadership. They implement culturally responsive pedagogies and develop an advocacy-oriented assessment. (p. 191)

Creating cognitive bridges between the students’ life at home and in community with instruction seems to contribute to the academic achievement of this student population. Craviotto, Heras, and Espíndola (1999) add the dimension of bilingual education and the effective use of a culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy in their collaborative research project, which included a bilingual teacher, undergraduates, a university professor and a multiracial bilingual class of twenty-seven fourth graders. The conceptual framework for their study was drawn from three aspects of Ladson-Billings’ (1995) description of a culturally relevant pedagogy. The authors identified the following characteristics as important in making the curriculum and the classroom culturally relevant to bilingual students:

- Families are actively sought as resources for knowledge.
- Multicultural literature is used as a resource for understanding perspectives.
- Students are regarded as active knowledge generators.



- Classroom dialogue is a fundamental aspect of classroom discourse.
- Classrooms are framed as an inviting space for exploration, learning, and dialogue among peers, students and adults.
- Several languages are used in the classroom as resources for communication and learning. (p. 27)

Successful teachers in the BPS have different ways of recognizing in their instruction—curriculum and pedagogy—the importance of culturally appropriate education. Successful instruction requires a wide array of strategies, techniques and approaches that actively link the students’ culture, language and experiences with new knowledge. And a successful curriculum in place shows how teachers are connecting texts and materials with the students’ lives and experiences.

Another important concept—differentiated instruction—guides our research. Hall (2002) defines differentiated instruction as *“a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms”* (p. 2). Differentiated instruction seeks to provide students with *“multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas”* (p. 2). It is a model that *“requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Classroom teaching is a blend of whole-class, group and individual instruction”* (p. 2).

The model of differentiated instruction is particularly relevant for Latino students, given that the approach to instruction takes into consideration their culture and language proficiency as well as their different learning styles. As explained by Hall, *“To differentiate instruction is to recognize students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests, and to react responsively”* (p. 2). Successful teachers know the students’ cultural background—their country of origin, family background and connection with their community. They link this deep understanding of their students with their learning style, language proficiency and level of academic work. This complete instructional picture results in being able to provide multiple points of access for these students. Examples include graphic organizers, word walls, supplemental texts and materials on the topic and the use of bilingual or native language materials. To make certain that all these elements align and result in students learning, teachers use the data provided by multiple forms of assessment which are appropriate for students with different levels of language proficiency and cultural understanding.

## 5. Family and Community Engagement

The Boston Public Schools recognizes the critical importance of having families actively participate in their children’s education. The BPS Family and Community Engagement Task Force (2000) identified the need to *“engage parents, families, and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communication”* (p. 1). A guiding principle for the district is to *“recognize families as instructional partners, encourage their involvement in the teaching and learning process as much as possible, and respect their time and their contributions”* (p. 1). Developing viable partnerships is the challenge facing district schools.

We acknowledge Moll’s (2001) analysis of institutions, with its emphasis that *“cultural institutions such as schools are not only pedagogical but political sites, with well-known ideological and structural constraints and biases, especially in relation to the social class and ethnic configuration of students”* (p. 25). Nevertheless, failure does not need to be a constant in our schools; we also strongly believe that *“we can develop pedagogies that privilege what children and families possess and treat their knowledge with respect and care, regardless of language or social origins”* (p. 25).

For Latino families, the process of engagement with schools is tenuous and oftentimes punctuated by misunderstandings, frustration and distrust. Guadalupe Valdez (1996) explains the disjunctions that prevent many Latino families and schools from ever connecting:

*Mexican working-class parents bring to the U.S. goals, life plans, and experiences that do not help them make sense of what schools expect of their children. At the same time, schools expect a*

*“standard” family, a family whose “blueprint for living” is based on particular notions of achievement. They have little understanding about other ways of looking at the world and about other definitions of success: (p. 5)<sup>3</sup>*

Valdez points out that there are superficial misunderstandings as well as fundamental ones, *“such as the conceptions of education, success, hopes and aspirations”* (p. 5).

Two major barriers to family engagement in schools are: the lack of communication between families and schools over expectations for parent involvement; and the organizational structure and culture of most public schools (Swap, 1993). Communication between Latino families and schools is challenging in terms of both cultural expectations and language proficiency. Swap (1993) provides an example: *“while most schools expect parents to visit the school several times during the school year, many immigrant parents may expect to delegate authority to the school and feel that it is inappropriate or a sign of disrespect to visit the school or participate in school activities”* (as quoted in Ouimette et al., 2002, p. 2). For teachers and administrators, this lack of engagement may be taken to mean a lack of interest in their children’s education. The relationship is further eroded when families have difficulty understanding notices, reports and requirements. This lack of understanding is both an issue of English language proficiency and of not understanding the discourse of the schools as articulated in their written communications.<sup>4</sup>

Further confusion is generated when the district and the schools give families conflicting messages. On the one hand, they express the need to have families participate in their children’s education; on the other, because it is a hierarchical system with countless policies, rules and regulations coming from above, families soon realize that their input is requested in very limited areas and with quite limited effect. There is then a disincentive to participate, particularly for families whose culture and language is different from that of the school, as the interaction may be both incomprehensible and inconsequential.

A first step in strengthening the relationship between families and schools is to develop *“[a] more collaborative approach to school decision-making [which] makes it easier for parents and schools to communicate and develop opportunities for high-quality involvement”* (Ouimette et al., 2002, p. 3; see also Swap, 1993; Seeley, 1985). Schools that are open to collaboration among all members of the school community enable parents and schools to become partners in helping students to succeed in school. According to Swap, a *“true partnership”* among families and schools contains four elements: *“creating two-way communication, enhancing learning opportunities at home and at school, providing mutual support, and making joint decisions”* (1993, p. 59).

The concept of *“funds of knowledge,”* further developed by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005), is particularly useful in our analysis of effective instructional links between schools, families and communities. They describe the location of these funds of knowledge as follows: *“These daily activities are a manifestation of particular historically accumulated funds of knowledge that households possess. Instead of individual representations of an essentialized group, household practices are viewed as dynamic, emergent and interactional”* (p. 41). Households are considered sites of knowledge and instruction that teachers can use as the foundation upon which to construct new knowledge. Families are thereby connected with the school in a powerful and productive manner, which generates trust and respect.

Moll (2001) provides guiding questions on those areas that a school may look into if they are to strengthen their connection with families and communities.

- How well does our school link student learning to families and communities?
- Do we provide ongoing parent education and training so parents can help their children?
- Besides sending notes or calling home, how do our teachers involve each family in each student’s education?

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<sup>3</sup> Even though Valdez’s work focuses on Mexican working-class families in the U.S., we believe that her findings help explain the disconnections facing Latino working-class families in the BPS.

<sup>4</sup> Discourse here means an institutionalized way of thinking, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic. Schools have a highly specialized lexicon that may or may not be accessible to families.

- Have all our teachers had training to help them use a student’s family, language and culture as a foundation for learning?
- How do our teachers tap into each student’s “funds of knowledge”?
- In what ways do we affirm students’ informal home language while linking it to Standard English?
- Do all our teachers know how to use students’ informal language as a tool for developing student literacy?
- How well does our school tailor its curriculum to the particular needs, interests and learning styles of individual students?
- In what ways do we encourage and teach to the many intelligences and learning styles of students?
- How does our school encourage students to articulate their dreams and aspirations and link them to their learning?<sup>5</sup>

Schools in the BPS where Latino families and teachers feel they have a true partnership need to be studied. These schools may have developed unique approaches to family and community engagement in terms of communications as well as in their decision-making process. We are looking for much-needed guidance in this area from families, teachers and administrators.

## Methodology

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This research project seeks to define and describe the concept of academic and social success as it relates to the education of Latino students in the BPS. Five BPS Schools (two elementary, one middle, two high schools) were used to produce this working definition and description of the concept of academic and social success.

Criteria for selecting the five schools were as follows:

- We chose schools where Latino students have high academic achievement as measured by outcomes on the the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).
- Exam schools were not included in the sample for selection of schools.
- Two elementary, one middle and two high schools were selected from schools where 60% of Latino students are in the Advanced and Proficient categories in the MCAS—both in English Language Arts (ELA) and in Math and less than 15% are Failing (both in ELA and in Math). The MCAS tests in Grades 4, 8 and 10 were taken into account.
- Two-way bilingual schools were not included since at this moment they are “too exceptional.” The focus of the study was to identify best practices that could be implemented in the majority of district schools.
- The gap in MCAS results between the two pilot high schools in our sample and the comprehensive high /schools in the district was too wide to justify the selection of any of the latter schools for this project.

**Interview and Observation Protocols.** To define and describe academic and social success as it relates to the education of Latino students we focused on these areas: 1) Mission and Vision, 2) School Organization and Decision Making, 3) School Culture and Climate, 4) Curriculum and Instruction and 5) Family and Community Engagement. [See Appendix 2 for rubric with which to analyze each area]

A team of three researchers visited the school for two days. Headmasters and Principals received our research proposal, agreed to have us visit, and organized our observations and interviews. Our research has yielded products for two audiences: 1) teachers and administrators and 2) families of Latino students. Our guiding question to produce these products is: What can families, teachers and administrators learn from schools that succeed in educating Latino students? [See Appendix 1 for further discussion of the methodology]

**Using a Latino Lens.** We used a Latino lens to design and conduct this research. By this we mean that the authors whom we chose as guides for this research are for the most part Latinos and the focus of their research is the

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<sup>5</sup> This survey can be found in: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/cityschl/city1\\_1c.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/cityschl/city1_1c.htm).

Latino experience in the United States. The methodology we chose uses a rubric designed to focus on Latinos as the unit of analysis. Finally, the authors of this research understand personally, politically and intellectually the Latino experience in the United States.

**About the Authors.** Understanding who the authors of this research are helps readers gain and understanding of our lens, our knowledge base as we entered the project and our potential biases. Eileen de los Reyes is a political scientist and Research Associate at the Gaston Institute, a faculty member in the Education Department at Goddard College and a faculty member in the Boston Teacher Residency Program. Before joining the Gaston Institute, de los Reyes was Senior Program Director at the Office of Language Learning and Support Services in the Boston Public Schools. De los Reyes is a member of the Boards of Fenway High School and Boston Community Leadership Academy. David Gonzalez Nieto is a student in the Public Policy Ph.D. program in the John W. McCormack School of Policy Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. David has a background in Applied Linguistics and his research interests are in Education and Language Policy. He is a Research Assistant at the Gaston Institute. Virginia Diez is a doctoral candidate in Child Development at Tufts University. Virginia studies child development as a cultural process, with a particular focus on the integration of research and practice. She has worked as a qualitative researcher for the Massachusetts Healthy Families Evaluation at Tufts University and, more recently, evaluated the Latino After-School Initiative for the Mauricio Gaston Institute.

For the purposes of this research it is important to know that all of us are Spanish speakers. Eileen de los Reyes is from Puerto Rico, David Nieto is from Spain and Virginia Diez is from Uruguay. All of us were born abroad. Two of us, de los Reyes and Diez, live permanently in the United States while Nieto is studying here. Our conversations are always in Spanish and the cultural lens we bring reflects our histories, our cultures and our experiences of migration. The process of understanding the education of Latino students generated intense discussions about our own cultural backgrounds and our experiences with what may be described as the “mainstream culture.” Even though we come from such distant places and our histories are very different, we found ourselves discovering how much we shared in terms of culture, ways of knowing and expressing ourselves, and ways of relating with each other, with families and with institutions. We were also struck by the similarities in the cultural disconnects we experience with the mainstream culture. As we learned from teachers, administrators, students and families we also learned from each other, clarifying our understanding of what it means to be a Latino in the United States and developing together what we hope is a framework for productive dialogue and actions to improve the education of Latinos in the BPS.

## Findings

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We began the project with the following research questions:

- How can academic and social success, as it relates to the education of Latino students, be defined and described?
- What are the characteristics of schools where Latino students succeed?
- What can families, teachers and administrators learn from schools that succeed in educating Latino students?

Our sample included five schools: Manassah E. Bradley Elementary, Hugh R. O’Donnell Elementary, Donald McKay-K-8, Fenway High School and Tech Boston Academy.<sup>5</sup> Below is a short profile of each of the schools; more in-depth descriptions based on the BPS school profiles can be found in Appendix 3.

**Manassah E. Bradley Elementary** is a K-5 school in East Boston. The school offers Advanced Work Classes in Grades 4 and 5. Students in Grade 3 participate in the Boston Ballet. The school uses the “Harcourt Trophies” reading

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<sup>5</sup> For a more complete school profile see: <http://boston.k12.ma.us/schools/profiles.asp>

program. Math and Writing are departmentalized in Grades 1, 2, 4 and 5. There is inclusive instruction for Special Education Students and English Language Learners. Test taking strategies are integrated across the curriculum in each content area. There is a Student Support Team to address specific concerns with performance or behavior. In AY 2005-2006, the school reported a total enrollment of 242 students, of whom 42% were Latinos, 39% White and 12% other minorities. The staff of 23 includes 17 teachers and is 88% White.

**Hugh R. O'Donnell Elementary** is a K-5 School in East Boston. The school is a diverse neighborhood school, where college preparation starts in Grades 4 and 5 and is provided to parents as well as students. Several programs provide educational support for parents, such as TERC (Technical Education Research Center) II Math classes and family computer classes. Grades K-5 use Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to differentiate instruction. English Language Learners have specialized literacy instruction during literacy block followed by ESL intervention. In AY 2006-2007, the school reported 235 students of whom 68% were Latinos and 22% white. The 22 staff members include 17 teachers. Racially, 91% of the staff is White and 9% is Black.

The **Donald McKay** is a K-8 school also in East Boston. The school has developed its own literacy program based on research designed to meet the individual needs of students. Reading is assessed three times a year as part of this model. Every student writes in a reading response journal daily. The Connected Math curriculum is used at Grades 6-8, and Readers'/Writers' Workshop is being implemented at all grade levels. An after-school program is offered in conjunction with the YMCA. In AY 2006-2007, the school reported a total enrollment of 622 students, of whom 89% were Latinos. Of a total staff of 60, 44 are teachers. The staff is 65% White, 20% Latino and 12% Black.

**Fenway High School** is a pilot school that offers a diverse, respectful, community-spirited faculty and student population. An established set of teaching practices and school structures knit together three core aspects: intellectual challenge, personalized relationships and collaboration with outside organizations. To ensure that students get the support they need to rise to Fenway's academic challenge, they are grouped into three Houses, each with its own faculty and counselor. In AY 2006-2007, the school reported 288 students of whom 36% were Latinos, 45.5% were Black and 15% were White. A total school staff of 36 includes 22 teachers. The staff is 64% White, 25% Black and 8% Latino.

**Tech Boston Academy** is also a pilot school founded in 2002 with the support of the Gates Foundation. TBA offers a college preparatory, which includes interdisciplinary project-based learning. Technology is integrated in the teaching of all core areas. TBA offers an extended day program that allows students access to academic support and extra-curricular activities. In AY 2005-2006 the school reported 338 students, of whom 45.5% were African-American and 29% Latino. 40% of students had a dominant language other than English. Class size is small with 20-24 students per class. Of a total staff of 33, 23 are teachers. The staff is 67% white and 27% Black.

We present our findings as follows: First, we propose a definition of academic and social success. Second, we present the shared strengths of the schools we visited. Third, we discuss an unexpected and critical finding which we describe as the *silences* in schools about the Latino students' histories, culture and identities. Finally, we offer our analysis of each of the schools and the best practices which they offer the district as examples of what is possible within the context of the Boston Public Schools.

## 1. Defining and Describing Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

As a result of this research we define and describe schools where Latino students are succeeding academically as educational organizations having the *will* and *capacity* to address instructional challenges efficiently and successfully. We define *will* as the ability of groups of people to mobilize around a shared goal or challenge and *capacity* as the organizational infrastructure to implement decisions and solutions. Successful schools define success/achievement as having a social and an academic component. These schools have a vision of the students' future as engaged members of society and as productive participants in the economy. Successful schools design the organization in ways that are conducive to teachers, staff and administrators being able to identify problems and propose solutions which can be tested, analyzed and revised. This process gives schools a dynamic sense of forward movement that sustains their energy and enthusiasm. School culture in successful schools promotes collaboration

allowing the organization—teachers, administrators and staff—to leverage their individual and collective knowledge and experiences. The school climate balances effectively academic rigor and nurturance addressing the students’ academic and socio-emotional needs. This balance generates harmony in the building and sustains an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Empathy and collaboration characterize the relations between schools where Latino students are succeeding academically and socially and the students’ families. The school staff understands the context of the families’ lives and adjusts to their needs and expectations. In successful schools, teachers and administrators take their full share of responsibility for student failure and do not tolerate low expectations for their students’ academic outcomes.

For Latino students being in a successful school means benefiting from all aspects of the school’s strength: organizational, social, cultural and academic. We end this research reassured that Latino students in schools such as the ones we examined are supported by a culture of academic and social success for all. We recognize, however, that even in these schools discussions about Latino students per se tend to be tentative and anecdotal. We envision schools where Latinos are excelling academically and socially as having historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge about the Latino students in their schools. Furthermore we envision these school connecting this knowledge with curriculum, instruction and relations with families and Latino community organizations.

We wonder about schools in the district which continue to struggle with academic and behavioral issues. Latino students in underperforming schools fall short on two counts. First, as part of schools in academic distress the specific academic needs of Latinos tend to fall by the wayside often bearing the brunt of the school’s failure. Second, unable to leverage a strong organization, culture, climate and instruction, these schools fall in the trap of blaming Latino students and their families for their lack of success.

## 2. Characteristics Of Schools Where Latino Students Succeed

This section focuses on identifying shared strengths we observed in the schools we analyzed. These may provide a framework for teachers, administrators and families to recognize key areas that promote the academic achievement of Latino students. We begin this section by discussing three areas which we find are critical to the success of Latino students: school climate, a culture of academic and social success, and a positive and empathetic perception of Latino students and families. These are necessary characteristics but they are not sufficient. A strong and effective school organization, and a culture that promotes a safe exchange of ideas are required as well; they provide the infrastructure necessary for students to succeed academically. We end by discussing the vision and mission of Fenway and Tech Boston and their impact in creating a strong foundation upon which to build academic success.

All of the schools we examined share the characteristics we describe below. These are schools where there is trust of authority, together with, and perhaps because of, the existence of clear rules of engagement, transparent mechanisms for staff, students and families to express their views and concerns, leadership that respects and acts upon teachers’ recommendations, and a collective sense of responsibility for the success of each student at the school. Here we provide examples from different schools to contextualize these characteristics.

We do not propose that these schools’ success can be reproduced easily. The developmental principles of equifinality (diverse paths lead to similar outcomes) and multi-finality (diverse outcomes may evolve from similar strategies) are clearly evident here in that each school has found a developmental path suited to its unique circumstances. However, we expect that the shared characteristics identified in this study will help to spotlight some key indicators of a quality education for Latino children. In the next section, titled *Best Practices*, each school is analyzed in more depth, making evident how these shared characteristics and best practices are the result of the histories, organizations and relations that make each of these schools unique.

## School Climate: How Students Experience the School

School climate in all of the schools we examined is nurturing and openly affective. Students see teachers as their protectors, mentors and members of their extended family. Latino students tell us they feel very comfortable having teachers and administrators as members of their families and they like knowing that their teachers are in close contact with their parents. In turn, teachers speak about their students as if they were their children. They describe them as hard workers and having great potential. There is reciprocity between teachers and students: their admiration and support for each other generate a climate that is both healthy and productive. There are few if any discipline problems in these schools.

We observed what we describe as a developmental process by which teacher-student relationships change over time as children develop not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. Children in elementary schools experience a very affective and maternal climate where they are visibly cared for and loved. In middle school we observed students who feel confident in who they are and how they are perceived by the adults, developing their independent voices and articulating powerfully their plans for developing professional identities. In the high schools we observed an environment that is mature and professional. Students are treated as young adults who are expected to behave as if they are in a professional environment. The process of deliberately preparing a learning environment that supports the development of children from elementary to high school—a continuum of developmental support—is worth exploring more as it may be helpful to other schools in the district.

An important finding came after our visit to the third school where we began asking ourselves: what feels so different in these schools? Re-examining our experiences we focused on the climate in the hallways. In many schools the hallway experience is a struggle for power between adults and students with teachers disciplining students on how to walk and speak and what to wear or not to wear. In contrast, hallways in the schools we visited are an extension of classroom pedagogy—spaces to engage in on-going conversations about the students' academic and personal lives. In one school, conversations focused on sports and families while in another the headmaster interrupted meetings with adults to visit with students in the hallways when classes changed. In these schools adults know each student's name and at least something about their lives, which makes their short exchanges meaningful and relevant. Teachers joked with students, praised their work and encouraged them when they knew they were having problems. It was evident that teachers and students were enjoying these exchanges. Students reciprocated with warmth and care and responded to teachers' requests with respect. In all of these schools the hallways were relaxed places where Spanish and other languages were spoken freely. The sense of safety in the classrooms and the teachers' enthusiasm for learning put us, and we assume students as well, in a great disposition to learn.

Schools offer examples of the work required to create and sustain a school climate conducive to teaching and learning. At the elementary schools the notion of being a family gets introduced visually and through the actions of teachers. For example, in a classroom at the O'Donnell, first graders read: "We are a school family. These are our family rules: share and work together; help each other; always do your best; listen to each other; respect everyone; play safely in the playground." Teachers tell us that they treat students "as if they were their own" and expect that the O'Donnell family will observe behaviors that make teaching and learning possible. At the Bradley there is a powerful balance between warmth and formality. Children are treated as young intellectuals who are expected to excel. These expectations are reinforced in the hallways by teachers and by the principal, Anne Kelley, who greets students in a poised and elegant manner making students feel important and smart.

Middle school Latino students at the McKay who have been at the school since the early grades, describe their teachers as "respectful" and "devoted." They feel adults listen to their voices and they let us know the process by which they can access the principal if they have a concern or an opinion to express: "If you want to speak to the principal, you first talk to your teacher and then to the principal." Latino students have internalized the message that college is the expected path and that they have already chosen their future careers. By the end of the eighth-grade they are self-assured and ready to move to high school.

At Tech Boston there is great effort put into establishing a close, affective relation with students which they describe as “tough love” as teachers and administrators seek to create a balance between being nurturing and being challenging. Additionally, a powerful peer culture sustained by the school motto—Rise and Fall Together—links students socially and academically. Fenway approaches the challenge of creating the conditions for the students’ academic success by moving on two tracks simultaneously. There is a deep and constant focus on the individual’s social and academic strengths and needs. Simultaneously, the school creates and sustains a range of communities that are safe and accepting of differences. Some of these include Boys to Men; Men, Organized, Responsible and Educated (MORE); Sister 2 Sister; Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) and the Latina Forum. This complex, labor-intensive approach of creating interlocking communities linked together by the school’s mission and vision generates the climate conducive to academic success.

Linking a school climate that is positive and productive with a culture of academic and social success is key to the success of Latino students.

### **School Takes Responsibility for Promoting Academic and Social Success**

There are no “excuses” for having students fail, we were told by one principal, and “We don’t play the blame game” was the mantra of a group of teachers. The bottom line is that failure is not an option at the Bradley, O’Donnell, McKay, Fenway or Tech Boston. Their stubborn determination to have students succeed in the face of countless challenges generates a culture that is intensely focused on the students’ academic and social success. Latino students believe they are included in these schools’ culture of achievement. They expect to go to college, become doctors, lawyers, artists and, through their accomplishments, honor the sacrifices made by their parents on their behalf and make their families proud. Listening to Latino students construct a narrative of success in schools and in life was inspiring, especially while confirming that these students are aware that other Latinos who are just like them experience failure and neglect in other schools in the district.

In the schools we visited, learning is an exciting process. Literacy, math, science, computers, college preparation courses, visits to the garden to study nature at the O’Donnell and music and art at the McKay are taught in ways that actively engage students. Teachers who exude confidence, and structure classroom space with the needs of their students in mind, create an environment that feels safe and predictable. We would characterize these classrooms as nurturing, safe, fun and intensely focused on content. A culture of inquiry where students and teachers engage in intense question and answer sessions creates the conditions for students to think independently, pose their own questions and begin defining their positions on important issues. We observed children in the second grade at the Bradley speaking about the Civil Rights Movement and students at Fenway discussing mathematics, science, historical and current social issues knowledgeably and eloquently.

At the elementary level, classrooms are carefully organized to facilitate the movement of students between workstations. Classrooms are colorful and child-centered with furniture, signs and materials appropriate to their ages. In high schools, classrooms resemble office spaces designed to promote collaboration and professionalism. Bulletin boards provide guidance in the academic subjects as well as reminders of acceptable behaviors. At the high schools, photographs and citations of world and national leaders from diverse backgrounds provide students with examples of how men and women contribute to society.

In all of the schools we visited students knew how to work individually and collectively. At the McKay we observed the power of collaboration when two girls in a fourth-grade Sheltered English Immersion classroom searching for the best word for their assignments used all resources at their disposal: English, Spanish, a thesaurus and each other. The support Latino children give each other by translating instructions, supporting newcomers and pushing each other with their academic work should be examined as it expands the concept of collaboration to include the strengths of bilingualism and biculturalism.

Principals/headmasters, teachers and staff have a clear social vision for their students. At Fenway the headmaster, Peggy Kemp, explained that she wants her students to be happy. Happiness in this case means that students would be able to realize their dreams. Educators are preparing students for higher education and for professional careers.



Teachers and administrators are cognizant of the obstacles facing Latinos and African American youth but these do not diminish in any way their aspirations for their students. Almi Abeyta, principal of the McKay, understands fully the challenges facing English Language Learners when taking the MCAS. Still, the expectation is that all adults including herself will keep working as hard as is necessary to have students succeed. Societal obstacles such as racism and poverty frame the challenges these educators face yet in these schools we witnessed a contagious conviction and determination that what they were attempting collectively was possible. Mr. Love, Chief Administration Officer at Tech Boston, tells us, “Latinos in this generation are working their butts off.” He explains that many have responsibilities outside of school such as babysitting, cooking and paying the rent.” Still, there are high expectations. Students, including Latinos, begin to believe that they can have the future these educators envision. With age and experience these students develop dreams of their own.

Two schools provide examples of how to create a culture of academic and social success that is consistent across the grades. Bradley’s strength is in creating a rigorous K-5 academic environment that is characterized by having “students’ questions drive the class.” First, teachers encourage students to seek help by repeatedly emphasizing that “learning is all about questions, not answers” and that “nobody is ever to laugh about someone who asks a question.” Students are then expected to answer any and all questions teachers ask. When students don’t understand, they are expected to ask questions. When a student asks a question the teacher will take advantage of the “teachable moment” and address the question until satisfied that the student understands. This process generates a culture of inquiry in the classroom. This culture of inquiry benefits students who may have difficulty with the language, as a question about a word or a concept will immediately generate a lesson. Creating and sustaining a culture of inquiry and academic and social success are critical areas which merit the attention of other schools in the district.

A Latina student at Fenway gave us an important insight into creating a culture of achievement when she told us: “We learn about relevant issues.” Other students at Fenway confirm her statement. For example, we found students engaged in answering the question “How do we strive for and achieve *our* American dream?” We observed students engaged in a sophisticated comparison of the work of Karl Marx and Ayn Rand and discussing the effectiveness of standardized testing and the validity of the No Child Left Behind Act. The connection between a student’s life and the subject of study generates curiosity, excitement and intensity, all of which we witnessed in these classrooms.

### **Refocusing the Problem: School Has a Positive and Empathetic Understanding of Latino Families**

The third building block supporting the academic and social success of Latino students is a positive and empathetic view of Latino families. Teachers and administrators at the schools we visited see Latino families as being engaged in their children’s education. They are acutely aware that families are working many jobs and may be having a hard time making ends meet. They recognize that immigrant Latino families face additional challenges such as understanding a new culture and language. Facilitating these families’ engagement with their children’s education is seen as the responsibility of the school.

Administrators and teachers gave us examples of how they facilitate this engagement. At a very minimum, schools have phone messages translated into Spanish, and hold parent events in the evenings, when most parents can attend (the Bradley conducted a parent survey to ascertain the best time to meet). In all of the schools there are Spanish-speaking personnel to facilitate conversations with families through written and oral translations when necessary. At the O’Donnell, a bilingual nurse not only facilitates communication with parents but also helps them communicate with pediatricians, refers them to services, and serves as a resource when children are diagnosed with ailments such as asthma and allergies, both of which are common at the school. Another feature that parents appreciate at the O’Donnell is the existence of clear grievance procedures. Parents know what procedures are in place if they cannot resolve differences with their teachers. These procedures are explicit, easy to follow and provide equal access for all.

Beyond the basics, an example which merits special attention is the provision of adult ESL classes for parents at the O'Donnell. In addition to providing a needed skill, this program facilitates families' involvement at the school and builds community among families.

An empathetic understanding of the immigrants' experience further strengthens a positive perception of students and families. One can rest assured that when a teacher at the O'Donnell who is a first generation immigrant explains that "I see them and I see myself," adding that "we all come from the same boat," there is an added determination and depth of knowledge to support immigrant students. In these cases the immediacy of the immigrant experience, and the fact that teachers reside in the same community as their students, generates great responsibility on the part of the teachers who see it as their mission to create a linguistic and cultural bridge for immigrant students and their families. We also find that an understanding of the experience of African Americans in this country, and of the education of African American youth, often functions as an effective bridge to begin understanding the social and academic needs of Latino youth and their families.

All of the schools we visited share a positive and empathetic understanding of Latino families and students. In two of the schools, the O'Donnell and the McKay, we heard the problems and the failures in education defined in a way that shifts the blame away from families and students. Instead, they determine that the problem resides in schools. The process of refocusing the problem liberates teachers and administrators from hopeless stagnation and paralysis as there is very little that can be done if there is an intrinsic problem (historical, cultural, linguistic) with Latino children and their families. The literacy coach at the O'Donnell tells us that she has "no concerns about the school's ability to educate Latino students. They just need the time and patience." She sees them as respectful and engaged and tells us, "The achievement gap is produced by the curriculum, not by students" or their families. When a child and his/her family are seen as willing and able to learn, then their academic success is the result of good instruction and a sound curriculum. These are the areas teachers have the power to change. At the McKay teachers tell us that the problem as they see it is that "schools have failed parents." They go further and state that teachers are part of "the family's team which they have created for their child." Teachers at the McKay in effect have inverted the relation of power that is prevalent in most schools, where families are often seen as needing to follow the directions of the school. They see themselves as one among many members of the families' team which families have assembled to support their children. Reiterating this relationship, the principal tells us that "we are coming alongside families to help." This shifting of power is profound and creates the conditions for schools to be seen as valuable contributors to the lives of communities, families and children.

Parents at schools that have made this shift in power state that "the school is like an extended family." Given the high involvement of extended family members in all aspects of a child's development in the Latino world, this statement connotes the existence of a relationship with the school that is personal, reciprocal and comfortable. Mothers of adolescent children value that their school counselors call them at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves and make themselves available to talk about their children at any time. They value that teachers give their children "lots of love, lots of support". One mother at Fenway reported that her son's speech therapist "lo quiere como a su hijo"—loves him as if he were her own child. This mother feels comfortable picking up the phone and alerting the speech therapist to concerns she has about her son's personal life expecting the latter to report back with her observations. Single mothers are glad their daughters were assigned a male counselor who they can approach as a "father" figure.

On an academic level, families attach great importance to the schools' abilities to provide opportunities to their children that they could not provide themselves. In high school, this usually involves helping senior students with college searches. In elementary school, mothers appreciate the school's community partnerships with sports and arts organizations that give their children enrichment opportunities otherwise unavailable or unaffordable.

In brief, schools that work well with Latino families understand, respect and adapt to their families' vision of what constitutes an appropriate interaction with the school. They do not expect parents to become advocates if their parents are not ready for it. Rather, these schools place special emphasis on giving access to all their students to the best teaching and learning of which they are capable, regardless of a parent's level of involvement.

## School Organization and School Culture Support Learning

Creating and sustaining a school climate that supports the academic and social success of students, a culture of achievement and a positive and empathetic understanding of Latino families and students requires an effective organization and a productive and collaborative school culture.

- **School Organization and School Culture: Reciprocity Between Faculty and Administrators.** A striking characteristic of all the schools we visited is the relation of the principal/headmaster with the faculty. These are schools where organizational roles are clear and where there is a mutually beneficial relationship between administrators and faculty. The principals/headmasters describe their roles (and the faculty concurs with their descriptions), as providing the necessary resources and stability for teachers to do their work successfully. Teachers see the principals/headmasters as their supporters, trusting their leadership in the building and in the district. Principals/headmasters recognize the teachers' expertise in the areas of curriculum and instruction, and they follow and support the teachers' recommendations. When disagreements emerge, the faculty and the principals/headmasters report that they engage in dialogue and treat each other as professionals who share the same educational goals. Dialogue between the principals/headmasters and teachers about all aspects of the school is collegial and respectful, generating harmony conducive to collaboration throughout the building. In turn, collaboration generates consistency in the academic areas and in the school's climate and culture, as well as safety to learn from experience and change institutional practices to adapt to new realities.

The O'Donnell provides evidence of the power of bringing together a strong principal with an effective teaching staff. As we were told by the principal and the teachers, the O'Donnell is a re-energized and exciting school. Dr. Robert Martin infused order, transparency and predictability into school policies and grievance processes, thereby strengthening the organization. He recognized the experience and knowledge of teachers and gave them instructional freedom and the materials they need to do a good job, which in turn strengthened instruction. The relation that has developed between the administrator and the staff is one of respect, affection and trust. This way of relating permeates the school and allows teachers to concentrate on the shared goal of students' academic and social success.

At Tech Boston a shared leadership model is meant to reinforce the process of "collegial decision making." By developing a shared leadership model the school is able to function efficiently and effectively. Each member of the school has a clearly defined role within the organization and understands that adopting the essential belief, vision and culture of the school is required. The result of designing such a strong organization that is capable of addressing challenges effectively is that Tech Boston has succeeded academically and socially in a very short period of time.

- **School Culture.** A collaborative culture that is supportive and safe characterizes faculty relations. Making mistakes and asking questions are very much part of the culture of these schools. Teaching is understood to be a complex process requiring knowledge, experience and collaboration. As one teacher said, "We don't do caves." Teachers in these schools constantly discuss instruction—how to improve and how to address individual and collective challenges. They feel confident in their teaching abilities and are willing and able to deploy individual and collective resources to address new instructional challenges. For example, there is no ambiguity as to who has the power to teach at Fenway: teachers are in full, moral and intellectual command of the classroom space. As in the other schools we studied, powerful and confident teachers generate safety and predictability in the classroom. In a safe and predictable classroom teachers are able create the conditions for a community of learners to emerge. Teachers at the McKay deploy their individual and collective resources to redesign the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. The result is the "McKay Model." Once a new or revised curriculum is in place teachers will analyze the results using data from student work and/or the MCAS, and make adjustments if necessary. For example, teachers at the Bradley disaggregated the MCAS data for each student and then by grade level, finding that multiple choice was a strength and open response a weakness. Having identified this weakness, they are able to address the issue school-wide since the culture and organization of the school promotes efficient and effective collaboration.

We find that the result of having a productive and collaborative school culture is a vibrant “learning organization” that generates individual professional growth as well as a sense of movement and accomplishment in these schools.

### Vision and Mission

Two of the schools in our sample, Fenway High School and Tech Boston, are pilot schools. We were impressed by the level of alignment between these schools’ mission and vision and the school’s organization, culture, climate and instruction. All members of these schools’ communities use the mission and vision to describe their social and academic lives at the school. Latino students in both schools define and describe their experiences at these schools using the language provided by their school’s vision and, in particular, their school’s mottos. We interpreted this to mean that students feel very much part of the ethos of their schools.

Fenway which is entering its 24th year as a pilot school, provides evidence that having a mission and vision that are relevant and inspiring to all constituencies—and able to withstand the test of time—generates a sense of purpose, innovation and academic and social success.

Fenway finds direction in its mission “to create a socially committed and morally responsible community of learners, which values its students as individuals.” It goes on: “Fenway’s goal is to encourage academic excellence and to develop intellectual habits of mind, self-esteem and leadership development among all students.” Stemming from the mission are the School Motto—Work Hard, Be Yourself, Do the Right Thing—and the Safety Guidelines.<sup>6</sup> The mission provides theoretical guidance for community members explaining *what* they believe in and *why*. The Habits of Mind, School Motto and Safety Guidelines provide the pedagogy telling them *how* they are going to fulfill and sustain the mission. Furthermore, Fenway’s educational foundation includes a vision and language to speak about a diverse community. Fenway’s success as an institution stems in large measure from the development of a foundation and shared language—a bridge—between adults and students that is useful, relevant and inspiring. Importantly, Fenway offers adults and youth evidence that highly functioning diverse communities committed to learning about each other’s languages, races, gender, sexual orientation, religions, and other traditions and to unlearning negative stereotypes can exist.

We observed the same kind of unity of vision and purpose at Tech Boston which opened its doors in 2002. Tech Boston lives by its essential belief that “every student can learn and develop into a responsible citizen by providing an environment that is both nurturing and challenging.” Given this belief Tech Boston sees it as its mission to identify what students need to learn and provide them with the structures and mechanisms by which this can happen. The school culture and climate at Tech Boston is grounded in its school motto, *Rise and Fall Together*, which makes it the responsibility of every member of the school community—teachers, staff and students—to make certain that all students succeed. A Latino student explained that at Tech Boston, “students watch over each other, it is more a school thing, not a Latino thing.” Indeed, we found that the school motto is implemented school-wide, defining the social culture of the school as well as providing a powerful support of instruction.

We see the connection between the mission and vision and the school culture and climate, curriculum and instruction and family and community relations as an area worth exploring further. We believe that providing students with a vision of education—why learning matters now and in the future—and providing them with a clearly articulated vision of how to live in the school, in the community and in society is perhaps the most important mission of educators. We hope other schools in the district analyze the examples offered by both Fenway and Tech Boston. We anticipate that other pilot schools may provide similar examples of close alignment between the mission and vision and all aspects of their schools.

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<sup>6</sup> **Habits of Mind:** Perspective; Evidence; Relevance; Connection; Supposition. **School Motto:** Work Hard, Be Yourself; Do the Right Thing; **Safety Guidelines:** Try it on; It’s OK to disagree; No shame, blame or attack; Take 100% responsibility; Group confidentiality

### 3. An Unexpected Finding: Understanding the Silences

Our research required asking specific questions about the education of Latino students. The rubric we drew on was very precise in its use of a Latino lens to examine the mission and vision, school organization, culture and language and instruction, as well as family and community relations. As soon as we began visiting schools we sensed that asking teachers and administrators to reflect specifically on Latino students made them visibly uncomfortable. This was not the case at the McKay, where the teachers and administrators are grounded in the Latino community and speak with great ease about Latino students and their families. In other schools we received answers that immediately shifted the focus away from Latinos. For example, “Latino students are supported because of what we do for all students here.” We also heard, “We don’t put kids into categories. They’re kids.” When asked, “How are Latinos welcomed and supported?” The response was, “As any other student.” When we asked, “What’s working for Latinos?” The response was, “We treat all students the same” or, alternatively, “Every student is different.” In one school where the highest percentage of the student population was Latino the interviewee mentioned the presence of African American and Arabic students at the school to suggest that questions focusing on Latinos were inappropriate. One teacher asked us to reframe our question: “Perhaps you are asking the wrong question. Maybe the question should be not why Latinos do well but why does everybody do well?”

We were perplexed to find ourselves in “colormute” schools (Pollock, 2004) and began to ask ourselves, and our interviewees, what was the source of this discomfort with questions about Latino students specifically? Two teachers were insightful in their responses. One explained, “There is a reluctance to think of students as belonging to an ethnic group, e.g., “Latinos,” because we don’t want to make assumptions. The school attempts to meet students where they are.” This is a complex statement which may be interpreted to mean that the assumptions may be negative or it could be that the school’s intense focus on the individual does not require knowledge about the students’ cultural backgrounds. Another teacher contributed an even more complex answer, “As a white man, I’m reluctant to speak of everyone as a group because, as a society, we have moved away from that.” He continued, explaining that “there are differences between Mexican and Dominican students. The expectations about female success are different. Occasionally, Dominican students don’t feel supported by their mothers. One needs to push Dominican females harder, longer. Difference with Haitians mothers who emphasize education.” This teacher is beloved by Latino students who find in him a father figure and a lifelong mentor. Through the years he has gathered very valuable knowledge by himself that allows him to be relevant in the lives of these students. Yet, he is reluctant to make generalizations or to communicate his knowledge to other teachers. He kept asking, “How do I say this to my colleagues?”

As Latinos ourselves we discussed this situation endlessly. What for us seemed so natural and straightforward seemed unexpected and uncomfortable for others. We were elated when teachers and administrators spoke about Latinos directly. In some cases we were impressed with how school staff who were not Latino but who had well-honed observational skills and an empathetic attitude could talk about strengths and weaknesses that we know to be rooted in socio-historical facts and cultural practices. Other times, staff would derive theories about culture without a good empirical foundation. For example, comparing a South American country to all the Spanish-speaking Caribbean seemed excessive, especially when based on the experience with a couple of families. In all cases, however, we welcomed *any* statements about Latinos in general or about Puerto Ricans or Dominicans, or Colombians, or Central Americans because these opened up the space for dialogue. Teachers, who care deeply for their students, would benefit from learning more about their cultures, if only they could be liberated from self-censorship, be given the freedom to say what is on their minds and learn from that conversation.

The fact that not all is well under this artificially-imposed silence finally became apparent at one school where students began to fill the void we were sensing. In a discussion about curriculum, a group of Latino students were befuddled about how teachers at their school did not seem to teach issues that were directly relevant to them. One student said, “We have been taught about Chinese migration. Why not Latino migration?” Another student continued, “People should be aware of where they come from, how they struggled, and how they are being deported.” This student’s statement may be a beginning point to show that even schools that are looking at history

and/or current events from the point of view of workers and minorities may fall short if they do not make their curriculum relevant to the lives of the students who are actually in the classroom.

We moved with the teachers and administrators to consider their schools as they see them. These are good schools for all students. In some instances, in particular when speaking about how teachers feel that Latino and English Language Learners learn best, we heard about manipulatives, visual cues and developing previous skills to link new knowledge with previous experience. And teachers know about the importance of phonics/vocabulary, of providing chances to read, modeling fun activities, emphasizing a central sound and those high frequency words. One teacher was very insightful when she made an observation that is supported by the Suarez Orozco's research (2001). This teacher reported that, "as they [Latinos] move along in school, they feel worse about themselves." This teacher recommends that there "...should be intervention groups and family and community support." Indeed, it seems the longer Latinos are in schools in the U.S. the worse they feel about who they are and their opportunities in this country.

Having done this research we conclude that there is tentativeness—even reluctance—to share the assumptions and frameworks that inform the work of teachers and administrators with Latino students and their families. To deepen the education of Latinos in the district, it is critical that we fill these spaces of silence with the research done thus far on Latino education in the United States. The field of culture and learning has been growing in the last two decades: universal theories of child development, which originally were derived from the observation of middle-class Northern-European American families only, have been re-examined and tested in different cultural communities within and outside the U.S. There is now a body of scholarly work that demonstrates how cultural variation in childrearing and teaching practices impacts learning and adjustment in different cultural communities. This body of knowledge would resonate with teachers who work with Latino students and their families and may give them a language to talk about race and ethnicity in their schools and classrooms.

Latino students are very much part of the success of the Bradley, O'Donnell, McKay, Fenway and Tech Boston schools. These same students who discussed the curriculum with such eloquence described their school and their teachers as their protectors: "They have our backs." This level of trust is creating the conditions for these students' success. The challenge for schools in the district is to gain the historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge necessary to deepen their understanding of this population and to incorporate this knowledge in the curriculum and in their relations with Latino students and their families. This knowledge needs to be made public in schools so it can be shared and analyzed. Mistakes and misunderstandings should be welcome, as these disrupt the silence and create the opportunities for dialogue leading to action. We have great confidence that at the schools we visited, which we describe as "learning organizations," teachers and administrators who are used to collaborating around shared educational goals will see what we propose as yet another challenge to be met with the same determination and expertise characteristic of their success.

## Best Practices in the BPS: Case studies of Five Boston Public Schools

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What follows is an analysis of five schools with a focus on how the mission and vision, organization and decision-making, curriculum and instruction and family and community relations support the academic and social achievement of Latino students. We identify what we consider to be the fundamental strengths—best practices—that should be analyzed and when appropriate reinvented at other BPS schools. We do not claim to present an exhaustive list of best practices; rather, what is highlighted here are school characteristics that struck us as particularly well suited for Latino students. Indeed, we hope that this study will serve to initiate a discussion not only of what works but also of what is missing.

These schools are welcoming and great fun to visit. Their energy is contagious. We hope to generate interest in understanding what is possible in schools in Boston and the work that remains to be done.

### “IF THEY FAIL, WE FAIL”:

#### Taking Pride In Teaching At The Bradley Elementary School

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The Bradley is a diverse school with a large Latino population. Of the 242 students, 41.7% are Hispanic, 38.8% Whites, 9.9% Black, 7.9% Asian American and 1.7% Native American. Many students arrive at the school with very limited English skills. The expectation at the Bradley is that every student—including English Language Learners and Special Education students—will succeed academically. The students’ success is the teachers’ responsibility. As we were told, “If students fail, we fail; if they succeed, we succeed.”

We observed all students, including Latinos, participating actively and succeeding in this rigorous academic environment. This environment is the result of the collaboration of experienced teachers focused on the academic achievement of each and every student. The success of the Bradley was recognized when it was named a Compass school (2007), not only for its high MCAS scores but also for closing the achievement gap between children of different ethnic and racial groups. At the Bradley in 2005, fully 77% of Latino students scored Proficient or Advanced in ELA and 48% in Math, and there were no Latino students failing the MCAS.

The Bradley’s strength is in creating a rigorous academic environment. From Kindergarten to Grade 5, students are expected to answer any and all questions teachers ask. When students don’t understand, they are expected to ask questions. When a student asks a question the teacher will take advantage of the “teachable moment” and address the question until satisfied that the student understands. This process generates a culture of inquiry in the classroom: students are asked to think independently, define their own questions, and answer in complete sentences and complete thoughts.

We see two elements at the core of the Bradley’s success. We find that a stable and experienced teaching staff has leveraged their reservoir of content knowledge and pedagogy to problem-solve around specific learning issues that come up in the classroom and at the school as a whole. These teachers are confident that together they can address any and all learning challenges facing their students. Expert teaching is further leveraged by the expectation that teachers will collaborate with each other. The ability to collaborate effectively generates great school-wide consistency in instruction, including consistency between grade levels.

## Best Practices

- *A Generation of Teachers That Does Not Play “the Blame Game”*

The Bradley has a stable faculty with very little turnover. Some teachers have been at the school for over twenty years. During the seven-year tenure of Principal Anne Kelly the school has hired only three new teachers, one of whom is a Bradley graduate. Teachers are proud of the school and their colleagues. They explained, “how lucky you are at the Bradley” how the “staff is unbelievable” and teachers “don’t want to leave this school.” Mrs. Kelly believes that “school culture is in people” so when they recruit new teachers they are very clear in explaining “how we do things and what we expect.” The culture of the school is not explicitly articulated, but is “ingrained.” Nobody wants to fail at the Bradley. Teachers take pride in their ability to provide a quality education based on their years of professional teaching experience, and they take their students’ success as evidence of their personal ability: “We are a generation of teachers who took responsibility for their actions.” They told us, “We don’t play the blame game.” Even when they are frustrated and wonder, “What can I do to teach?” or when they recognize that “we cannot control [the socioeconomic situation] of families, “we don’t use it as an excuse.” Instead, teachers maximize their individual and collective knowledge of teaching to solve instructional challenges large and small.

The school does not believe in labeling and separating children. Teachers will address the student’s academic needs whether or not they have been “officially” labeled. English Language Learners are placed in the same classrooms as their native English-speaking peers; Special Education students are in the same rooms as regular students. However, teachers are aware that some of their students need special support and provide mechanisms to address these. First, teachers encourage students to seek help by repeatedly emphasizing that “learning is all about questions, not answers” and that “nobody is ever to laugh about someone who asks a question.” They believe in letting “students’ questions drive the class.” This school-wide approach lets teachers check for understanding. Questions are also an opportunity for students to collaborate. Teachers encourage students to answer their peers’ questions. “Who wants to answer that?” they will frequently ask. Once questions are asked, teachers will use students’ questions to generate “teachable moments.” They pride themselves in their flexibility and willingness to be derailed from a pre-conceived lesson plan in order to spend time on important learning issues as they come up.

We witnessed one of these moments during a Math class in the fifth grade. The teacher called children in the order in which they were seated to answer different questions about multiplication equations on the board. One boy said, “This is hard,” and when his turn came up he gave an incorrect answer. The teacher stayed with this child, broke down the problem into easier components to explain it, helping him move through the different steps until he managed to complete the exercise with the correct answer. The teacher said casually, “How did you get it so fast?” and moved on to the next child. Another teacher confirmed the approach when she explained, “if a child does not understand the word ‘fence’ that is the lesson.”

Expert teachers at the Bradley will teach any child under any circumstances. Confidence in their teaching abilities is exemplified by this teacher’s comments: “I wing it. I take it from the kids. Whatever they don’t know, I’ll teach.” This confidence in “winging it” comes from years of individual and collective experience and success.

- *A School That Thrives on Collaboration*

The Bradley is a small school where teamwork and communication are highly valued. Support for teamwork, especially around academic instruction, comes all the way from the top. The principal values teachers’ opinions and is deliberate about hiring teachers who will fit as members of the school team. There is a protocol for communication: administration-staff, staff-staff and staff-students. Staff is comfortable bringing up an issue because they know it will be addressed. In meetings, staff may disagree, have different opinions, but they resolve them and move forward together. “We don’t do caves,” one teacher explains. “It’s easier when teachers are working with each other.” Considerable professional development happens within the school through communication among teachers. Teachers pride themselves in sharing their work, especially their most effective



practices. When someone has a hard time teaching something, they help each other with ideas. A unique feature of the Bradley is that the school is organized into departments based on content areas (reading, writing, math, science and social studies). According to the principal, “It’s easier when teachers are working with each other since they are teaching to their strength.”

When asked what accounts for the Bradley’s success, teachers identify their ability to collaborate around instructional issues. Common planning allows them to integrate the grades. Collaborative coaching creates the opportunity for teachers to ask for ideas when they are having difficulties teaching a topic. Analysis of data helps them identify areas of need and identify instructional solutions. For example, when they disaggregated the MCAS data for each student and then by grade level they found that multiple choice was a strength and open response a weakness. Having identified this weakness they were able to address the issue school-wide since the culture and organization of the school promotes efficient and effective collaboration.

- *Consistency In Instruction*

Teachers throughout the school espouse the same pedagogical approaches. For example, in some of the classrooms we observed teachers working on the concept of a timeline. Across grades we heard teachers ask: “What do you think happens first? Next? Then? Students learn about the development of timelines by using the same materials in different grades, with increasing academic expectations as students move up. All classrooms have their own culture and teachers their own styles. However, there is great consistency both in terms of the content as well as the pedagogy. We highlight some of these pedagogical approaches below.

- *A Culture of Inquiry*

Teachers consistently promote a culture of inquiry through a constant question and answer process, resulting in sophisticated discussions. For example, students in the second grade considered questions such as “Why is it important to have a government?” “What would happen to our laws if we didn’t have a government?” “What would happen to the class if we didn’t have rules?” Students moved from one level of analysis to the next with the help of the teacher. The series of questions and answers culminated with a question about Rosa Parks and what her contribution had been. We were very impressed when a small child confidently gave a complete and complex explanation of Rosa Park’s contribution. In a fourth-grade Advanced Work class where the topic was “All about the museum,” students were creating timelines of their lives.

The following exchange between the teacher and students shows how the teacher makes certain students understand the topic before they begin the project:

Q: “What kind of scientist are you as you do this? A: historian, geographer, economist, political scientist.

Q: How are you a historian? A: By telling people about our past.

Q: How are you a geographer? A: By writing about country, home, state, by doing maps.

Q: What’s the difference between a want and a need? A: house vs. mansion; car vs. Ferrari.

Discussions in both of these classrooms were very lively with students willing and excited to participate. Teachers effectively checked what each student understood and what remained unclear.

The teachers and the principal create a very serious academic environment punctuated by humor and warmth. Students are treated with the utmost respect, even formality. They are made to feel important and believe that what they have to say matters. A wrong answer will never generate laughter, we were told. “Nobody mistreats anyone. If someone laughs, they’ll never laugh again. You never say anything unless you have something nice to say.” Humor and warmth sustain this culture of inquiry. For example, when a student is called to the office and comes back with a book the teacher asks, “Mom?” Student nods. Teacher: “Thank God for moms.” To a student working on the board she says, “You want to make it look pretty.” Teachers will constantly praise students by saying things such as “Excellent, honey.” The environment the teachers and principals create is one where children know they are respected and expected to be smart. Teachers provide these smart children with encouraging warmth and affection.

- **Turn And Talk**

Teachers tell us that now they are “working on stepping back and becoming facilitators to encourage more peer interaction.” One pedagogical approach that is particularly well developed is “turn and talk.” For example, in a Grade 4 class, students were actively engaged in a story the teacher was reading. In a soft voice and with great intonation the teacher kept students engaged. Twice she stopped reading and asked for the meaning of the words: “boisterous,” “timid,” “leisure,” “chicks pinched.” She told students to “turn and talk”; everyone turned and talked at the same time, then they raised hands to answer the teacher’s questions. The teacher continued reading, seamlessly connecting the story with a conversation about vocabulary. In another class a teacher asked, “ Why did the author write the story? Entertain or inform? Students turn and talk discussing whether it was to entertain or inform. The teacher asked students to “try to picture the story in your head. What happens before she leaves for school?” Students immediately turned to each other and, in a very organized manner, had conversations about the story.

As we moved from class to class it became evident that teachers were moving intentionally from a teacher-student interaction to a student-student interaction. They were doing this without losing the rigor of the question-and-answer process where the teacher is asking increasingly difficult questions and taking students through different levels of analysis. Evidently teachers are collaboratively developing this pedagogical approach, as we saw it repeated in a number of classes we visited.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The strength of the Bradley lies in consistent and challenging instruction school-wide. Limited resources have resulted in making difficult choices—for example, choosing to offer science and not art. The school would offer an art program if resources were available.

The school would benefit from supplementing its focus on academics with an effort to understand some of the identity issues their students are already starting to confront in their elementary classrooms. Incorporating materials relevant to students’ lives into the curriculum may support their academic achievement and start creating a base for their social and emotional adjustment in middle and high school.

## **RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP:**

### **Educating Immigrant Students at the O’Donnell**

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The O’Donnell is a multicultural neighborhood school with most students walking to school. It is a Silber Literacy School using Harcourt-Trophies and History Alive K-5. The school describes itself as a safe, child-centered, high-performing, and family-friendly school. O’Donnell parents have an evening in-school adult ESL program. All home-school communications are sent in English and Spanish. The mission of the school states, “We educate our students in a learning-centered atmosphere, where good teaching and responsible leadership prepare each child to reach high levels of achievement, and where partnership of school/home/community truly works for children.”

All students including Latinos, who constitute 64.1% of the student population, are valued members of the O’Donnell family. Upon entering the school, they find the warmth and stability of a highly functioning extended family. The idea of school and classrooms as family permeates all aspects of the school. On a first grade sign, classroom rules are introduced as: “We are a school family. These are our family rules: share and work together; help each other; always do your best; listen to each other; respect everyone; play safely in the playground.” Dr. Martin, the school principal, addresses students by their name—in Spanish where appropriate—carefully balancing affection and firmness. Teachers treat students “as if they were their own” also balancing a nurturing approach to

teaching with high academic expectations. Children walk the hallways confidently and cheerfully greeting staff and visitors alike.

We see two critical areas that create the conditions for Latino students to succeed at the O'Donnell. First, this school brings together a principal with a clear vision of education and of his role as a leader with an experienced and dedicated staff. The school's strength stems from the ability of its current principal, Dr. Robert Martin, to infuse order, transparency and predictability into school policies and grievance processes, in addition to recognizing teachers' abilities, giving them instructional freedom and providing them the materials they need to do a good job. The relation that has developed between the administrator and the staff is one of respect, affection and trust. This way of relating permeates the school and trickles down to children. It also frees teachers to concentrate on the shared goal of students' academic success. Second, both the principal and the teachers understand the education of their students from the vantage point of their own experiences. Dr. Martin informs his understanding of the education of disenfranchised groups from his experiences as an African American man, parent and educator. He understands the societal boundaries placed on children of color and is determined to provide them with an education that prepares them for college. Teachers, who are for the most part first- or second-generation immigrants, understand first-hand what it means to navigate home and school when these two worlds speak different languages and have different cultural values. While not possessing extensive knowledge about the socio-historical circumstances of their Latino students, Dr. Martin and the staff at the O'Donnell create a powerful vision of education by combining warmth with high expectations that produce positive results for Latino children.

## Best Practices

- *Leadership that Works: Creating the Conditions for Teachers to Succeed*

Dr. Martin arrived at the O'Donnell in 2003 with twenty-five years of experience as a school principal. He let us know that contrary to other schools he has led this one was not in crisis. Teachers at the O'Donnell are experienced and professional. Dr. Martin focuses on two areas needing attention: the physical plant, and the curriculum. As an administrator Dr. Martin believes that in order to learn, children need a clean, safe and orderly school. This belief results in implementing a comprehensive plan to clean the building and improve its maintenance including the installation of utility sinks on each floor so cleaners don't have to haul water from the first floor. He has equipped all classrooms with new furniture and rugs, started a student-maintained garden, re-rubberized the schoolyard, and installed floodlights along the building to light it up at night. The result of these efforts is an impeccably maintained school that, indeed, feels clean, safe and orderly while warm and inviting. The expectation is that this revitalized school setting will positively impact teaching and learning.

Dr. Martin also focuses on the curriculum. All teachers we interviewed speak about his commitment to providing them with all the textbooks and materials they need to teach. The result is a school where books—hard cover and new—can be found in all of the classrooms and in the library, making evident that reading is a priority. Dr. Martin tries to inculcate in students the idea that “books are your friends.... Someone took the time to write this because they wanted you to know what they were thinking.” He insists, “You have to mechanically push kids to read increasingly more difficult material. If not, they will go for easy ones. The rule is ‘If you’ve memorized the book, it may be time to move on.’” Dr. Martin also brought in many new curricular materials ranging from the Silber School Harcourt Trophies Literacy curriculum to science instruction starting in Kindergarten.

Having a strong and capable principal with a clear vision of his role at the school is necessary but not sufficient. Dr. Martin has infused order, predictability and equity based on the systematic observance of school policy and contracts. At the same time, he has found a staff willing and able to reenergize their teaching and the curriculum. Recognizing teachers as competent professionals he delegates curricular decisions to the literacy coach and to the teachers. The literacy coach is instrumental in making certain that the curriculum is integrated across grade levels and that it addresses the academic needs of the students. Teachers understand that this principal recognizes their expertise and will provide them with all the resources necessary to do an excellent job. The relation that develops between the administrator and the staff creates the conditions for students to succeed academically. Fifty-five percent of Latino students are in the Advanced and Proficient categories in the English Language Arts (ELA) section of the MCAS and 30% in Mathematics, with no Latino student failing ELA and only 10% failing in Mathematics.

- *Latino Students and Families Are NOT “a Problem”*

At the O’Donnell all students, including immigrant children, are seen as having great potential and being capable of succeeding academically. The faculty and the principal describe families as engaged in their children’s education. This positive understanding of children and families places the responsibility for the students’ educational success squarely on the shoulders of the school. For example, the literacy coach tells us that she has “no concerns about the school’s ability to educate Latino students. They just need the time and patience.” She sees them as respectful and engaged and tells us, “The achievement gap is produced by the curriculum, not by students.” If a child and his/her family are seen as willing and able to learn, then their academic success is the result of good instruction and a sound curriculum. These are the areas where the faculty and the administrator at the O’Donnell focus their expertise and their energies.

The coming together of an African-American educator and a staff that is mostly first- or second-generation immigrant generates a deeper understanding of the students and a determined sense of responsibility for their academic success. As an African-American educator in an urban school, Dr. Martin feels responsible for ensuring that students coming from disenfranchised groups succeed in the elementary grades and go on to college. For example, to start giving children the skills they will need to succeed in college, the O’Donnell participates in AVID, a college preparation program started in Chicago that is already in place at the middle and high school levels. The O’Donnell is the first elementary school in the district to participate in AVID (grades 4-6). The Morning Stars is another program that recognizes the need to pay special attention to African American and Latino boys. It is designed to address reading difficulties. On the day we visited, students were working on developing strategies for becoming aware of their learning process. In this lesson they were assigned the roles of predictor, summarizer, questioner, and clarifier.

The immigrant experience of many teachers who are of Italian descent and have lived in the neighborhood all their lives, on the other hand, focuses teachers on finding instructional materials that work for their students. The Literacy Coach grew up in East Boston, and also lived in Greece, which provides her with an understanding of how hard it is to adapt to a new language and culture. We heard the immigrant experience as a point of reference for teachers often. For example, a teacher begins his discussion of his views about education by stating “I am an immigrant.” He then recounts memories of being misunderstood and mistreated. These are the experiences that inform how he instructs and treats his students. Another teacher tells us, “I see them and I see myself,” adding that “We all come from the same boat.” The immediacy of the immigrant experience generates great responsibility on the part of the teachers who see it as their mission to create a linguistic and cultural bridge for immigrant students and their families.

Personal experience informs how teachers at the O’Donnell understand the education of Latino children. The perceived similarity between the experiences of Latino families at the schools and their own, fosters a sense of solidarity with English Language Learners. Many of the teachers were themselves English Language Learners who remember going back to non-English speaking homes during their elementary years. One teacher remembers how when she was a child her parents, who spoke no English at home, sometimes pretended to understand what school staff was saying but really did not. Teachers are sensitive to the communication needs of their students’ families and of the potential barriers that may impede their involvement in the school. They know, however, based on this shared experience with their students, how to communicate and support the needs of families who do not speak the language of the school and how to create bridges between these two worlds.

We also learn from teachers about the uniqueness of East Boston as an immigrant community. A teacher tells us there is “something about East Boston.” It is a “stepping stone,” an “ideal city” that is “very rich,” “economical,” and “near Boston.” Moreover, he describes the immigrant’s journey in East Boston using his family as an example. The Latino journey will be similar in that it begins with “everyone speak[ing] Spanish, others come and “the community grows” and “then people move.” In this narrative teachers are an integral part of the student’s journey, which they know will be full of challenges but which they anticipate will be a successful one. The frameworks of the principal and of the teachers are different historically, culturally and linguistically. Yet together they generate an understanding of Latinos and their education that is successful.

- **An Inclusive Print-Rich Environment**

Learning at the O'Donnell is an exciting project that includes literacy, math, science, computers and college preparation. Learning takes place in multiple ways and multiple settings, always within a print rich environment. There are fiction and non-fiction books in all classrooms and in the library, manipulatives, charts, word walls, poetry, learning centers, plants and at one point butterflies flying outside. Learning takes place in the classroom and in the garden.

There are multicultural books in every classroom we observed and in the library. Even the math specialist's library has multicultural books. Topics include a Muslim child, Duke Ellington, Babushka's Doll, Uncle Jed's Barbershop; there is a book titled *If you lived when there was slavery in America*, and a book about sharks is in Spanish. In the school library the librarian, a volunteer who helped create the first school library in East Boston, reads the book *Cowboy Jose* to students. The book is in English with many Spanish words which the children recognize and eagerly translate into English. The librarian also reads an English and Spanish poem. She is funny and as she reads, children laugh. They are all attentive, engaged. The librarian tells them the book is from a local library. The classroom teacher, who is sitting next to the librarian, encourages children to borrow books from the library over the summer.

Posted in a prominent bulletin board one finds a series of outstanding poems that students from El Salvador wrote for a contest. One of these is titled "Los sueños de El Salvador" and is written in English, another written by a seven year old is about "la amistad," a poem about friendship. In writing poems, children were taught about the importance of meter. Students from around the world sent drawings and of twelve prizes awarded, two were given to students at the O'Donnell. The Consul General of El Salvador came to present the certificates. According to the principal, "Once kids find their voice, they really just fly."

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Notable at the O'Donnell is how two different frameworks for understanding students' experiences —the principal's experiences as an African-American man and educator and the teachers' experiences growing up with parents who did not speak English—coalesce in a way that is protective for Latino students. While not possessing extensive knowledge about the experiences of Latino immigrants and their children, Dr. Martin and the staff at the O'Donnell create a warm climate and a culture of success that produce positive results for Latino children.

For there to be a strengthening and deepening of the academic achievement of Latino students at the O'Donnell we see two challenges ahead. One is to become conscious of the different frameworks operating at the O'Donnell and determine what helps explain the Latino experience and what does not. We also see a need to deepen the school's professional knowledge about particular Latino groups at the school.

### SERVING THE COMMUNITY:

#### Donald McKay K-8 School, a Latino School in East Boston

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The McKay is a school rooted in its location in East Boston and its community. Latinos constitute 90.9% of the student population at the school. From the principal to the teachers and students there is a refreshing familiarity with Latino culture and language. At the McKay, being in East Boston and working with Latino children and families are sources of strength. They are building blocks for an education that "ensures that all students are equipped with a quality education to ensure them access to institutions of higher education."

In this environment Latino students thrive. They describe their teachers as "respectful" and "devoted." Students talk about their career goals: lawyer, math professor, nurse, veterinary. Some give us their rationales for choosing these professions. "I'm an arguer, so I should be a lawyer." "I'm a helper, so I'd like to be a nurse." Teachers,

according to students, “don’t let you give up.” They tell us they are encouraged “to build their own goals” also letting us know that college is the expected path for all students. Latino students feel adults listen to their voices. As one explained, “If you want to speak to the principal, you first talk to your teacher and then to the principal.” These self-assured students, who are developing strong voices and a clear path in life, recognize the McKay as the source of their strength.

We find two key elements at the heart of success at the McKay. First, this is a school that reflects and serves the community in which it stands. Faculty and staff appreciate and respect the Latino families that are part of the school. Teachers tell us that “parents want their children to succeed.” The problem as they see it is that “schools have failed parents.” They go further and state that teachers are part of “the family’s team which they have created for their child.” The McKay is a school that speaks clearly about the fact that the community they serve consists primarily of Latinos. And in this community they find strength and direction. Second, we find that the principal’s understanding of leadership as “service” strengthens the relationship of the school and the community. This is Mrs. Almi Abeyta’s chosen community: her family lives in East Boston and her daughter attends the McKay. She, like her students’ families, is placing her hopes in this city and in the McKay. Her commitment to service, together with the teachers’ dedication, creates the conditions for Latino students to succeed.

## Best Practices

- **A School that Reflects the Community**

The McKay is located in East Boston, a neighborhood whose Latino population went from 5,804 in 1990 to 14,990 in 2000, a percentage change of 158.3%.<sup>7</sup> Latinos constitute 89.5% of the student population at the school. For 78.2% of the students, English is their second language and 49.8% are officially classified as English Language Learners. Contrary to countless schools where Latino culture and language represent educational challenges (often seen as insurmountable) at the McKay these are the basis—the stepping-stones—for teaching and learning.

The responsibility for the problems of education, according to teachers, falls squarely on schools, not on families or students. When teachers tell us that they are part of “the family’s team which they have created for their child” they have in effect inverted the power relation that is standard in most schools, where families are often seen as needing to follow the directions of the school. They see themselves as one among many members of the families’ team which families have assembled to support their children. Reiterating this relationship, the principal tells us that “we are coming alongside families to help.” This shifting of power is profound and creates the conditions for the McKay to become a school at the service of the community.

English and Spanish are at this moment in the history of East Boston the languages of the neighborhood. The McKay leverages its bilingualism as a means of building strong relations with families and advancing the students’ academic achievement. Language does not represent a problem in communicating with immigrant families, since there are Spanish-speaking personnel at the school. Most of the elementary teachers are bilingual and teachers and staff will tell you they are trying to learn Spanish. In the classrooms we observed we saw students using Spanish effectively to learn English. They used Spanish to help students who did not understand, to move quickly through instructions and explore new and more complex vocabulary. In the hallways we saw healthy and vibrant bilingualism, with both English and Spanish being used freely. In this environment, where bilingualism is seen as a valuable resource, newcomers (who teachers tell us constitute 15% of classrooms) are made to feel comfortable in their new school. Students who are new to the country learn the English language while continuing to build on a strong sense of self and on their original culture and language.

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<sup>7</sup> Figures from the Boston Indicators Project: <http://www.bostonindicators.org/IndicatorsProject/> Whites constitute 49.7% of the population in East Boston experiencing a decline between 1990 and 2000 of 23.6%. Latinos constitute 39% of the population experiencing an increase during this same period of 158.3%.

- **Service Leadership**

Almi Abeyta tells us that she “leads with her heart.” She speaks of sacrifice on behalf of those she has chosen to serve and having faith in others and in the future. As a Latina, Mrs. Abeyta recognizes the obstacles facing Latino students and knows that to succeed they will require “inspirational” teachers and leaders with the power to transform their lives. Mrs. Abeyta understands leadership as service and as her vocation; these are sources of strength that keep her focused on helping students achieve their full potential and on instilling pride in who they are and where they come from.

Service leadership requires openness to criticism and change that helps improve performance. Mrs. Abeyta recounts being given an unsatisfactory for her first evaluation as a principal at the McKay in the areas of Instructional Leadership and Operational Leadership. She was grateful because it was an “unsatisfactory with love.” We relate Mrs. Abeyta’s concept of love to Paulo Freire when he says, “It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in.”<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Abeyta has the courage to listen to criticism and not give in. This is the same expectation she holds for students and teachers. As she told us there are “no excuses for low expectations.” Mrs. Abeyta’s clarity as to her role as a leader, along with her willingness to be responsible and to make sacrifices, models for students and teachers what is required to be of service to the community, families and students.

- **A Complete Curriculum.**

At a time when most public schools have eliminated art, music and sports we were impressed to find all of these at the McKay. Moreover, these support the development of reading and writing, content knowledge and language development. For example, New England SCORES connects soccer and literacy and requires that students be responsible both in the classroom and in the field. In our visit to the art classroom we found students actively engaged using the motifs of the US flag to come up with new design ideas for their Fourth of July decorations. The classroom was bubbling with excitement as students collaborated with each other and engaged their teacher, who was equally excited about their projects. On the day we visited, music students were rehearsing for a concert they were giving at the school. We find that art, music and sports give the McKay added vitality as well as new avenues for students to explore their talents while strengthening their academic skills.

Oftentimes we have heard in other schools in the district the statement, “We don’t have Sheltered English Instruction” here. This may discourage families with students who are English Language Learners from attending the school. Evidently the McKay does not discourage English Language Learners from attending. Instead it adjusts to the needs of the community by having qualified teachers and resources to serve these students’ needs.

Members of the school’s Instructional Leadership Team discussed with us the concept of culturally responsive teaching as well as their role as mediators between two cultures. We found evidence in classrooms of how teachers implement these concepts which we discuss below. We also discuss the pedagogy which teachers use to promote collaboration.

- **Curriculum**

Teachers at the McKay recognize that the curriculum must address the needs of Latino students who are at different levels in their English language development. They reject the idea that any curriculum or method is going to address the needs of all students; instead they adapt their teaching style to their students’ needs. This approach to teaching results in creating what was later described in the district as “The McKay Model.”

The McKay Model was designed with the intention of improving the writing and reading abilities of the students. The school chose to begin teaching with Fountas & Pinnell’s word study method. Fountas & Pinnell’s books provide resources for guided reading lessons making special emphasis on phonics, spelling and vocabulary. In addition the

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<sup>8</sup> Paulo Freire. *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who dare to teach.* (1998).

principal identified the need to supplement Fountas & Pinnell’s method with materials specifically designed for English Language Learners such as Rigby Phonetics, *On our Way to English* by Hampton Brown and Steck and Vaughn Vocabulary. These methods emphasize the use of visual cues and hands-on activities as part of the curriculum. After proving that the new system was actually working and in consultation with the faculty, Mrs. Abeyta decided that given the needs of the school’s population they would purchase Rigby Phonics and Hampton Brown for all K-3 classrooms. The district purchases these materials for SEI classrooms.

Given that teachers receive in their classrooms students who have recently arrived in the country, they adapt the texts as necessary. For example, finding that the directions to play a game in class are too long and difficult, a teacher adapts them so that students can understand them faster. Stories that are culturally appropriate for Latino students linking their histories with the new culture can be found in classroom libraries. All classrooms we visited were filled with visual cues supporting the curriculum: word walls, graphic organizers, posters with all kinds of descriptive images and manipulatives. These allow students to have additional points of reference as they engage the curriculum. These visual cues are often in both English and Spanish—for example, the word “figuras” next to “shapes” in an art class.

- **Accelerating Learning by Using Spanish**

A strength at the McKay is the effective use of Spanish to accelerate learning. A particularly effective use of English and Spanish happens when students receive instructions. For example, when a little girl repeats the teacher’s instructions in Spanish, all the students at her table listen and follow her instructions. Or a teacher tells a student “está al revés” to let a student know that what he is doing is upside down. We observed how a teacher went around asking questions and, when one of the answers came in Spanish (“treinta y ocho”), she validated the knowledge and teaches the language saying, “Correct! Thirty-eight.” We also overheard two girls in a fourth-grade SEI class looking for the best words to use in their essays. They considered fascinating, tremendous and spectacular and then went to the thesaurus to check on what “flabbergasting” meant. After settling on which words they would use they moved to consider another way of saying “enjoy” which one of them knew in Spanish (disfrutar) but not in English, resulting in more conversation about vocabulary. These girls were resolute in their search of new words and used all resources at their disposal—English, Spanish, the thesaurus and each other.

- **Structuring Individual and Collaborative Work**

The physical space as well as the pedagogy employed by teachers promotes individual and collective work. Workstations are clearly labeled, desks are organized in groups of four and resources are easily accessible. Moving from one place to the other in the classroom can be done easily and with a minimum of disruption. From K-2 to middle school we saw students working effectively in pairs, in groups of four and individually. Since students know how to work independently and collaboratively, teachers are able to work one-on-one with students or with small groups. In a first-grade SEI classroom we observed the teacher working with a small group of six students on their reading while the other students either read on the rug or worked on self-made books in the in the ABC (writing) Center. All the students seemed oblivious of our presence, concentrating on their work.

In one of the classrooms we visited, the code of conduct was displayed prominently: “We will be kind and work together to help and take care of each other; we will be responsible, prepared, and follow directions; we will respect our classmates, teachers, and objects in our classroom; we will work hard ALWAYS because we have to learn so much this year.” This summarizes the kinds of behaviors and attitudes we observed. In particular we were impressed by the students’ concern for each other’s learning. This was a consistent pattern where students were mindful that everyone in their group understood and were able to do the work. For example, we heard a student tell the teacher not to worry—“She is doing ok”—referring to a student who had been in the class for just two days. Teachers and students agreed that there are very few behavior issues disrupting teaching and learning and we saw first-hand how students help and take care of each other. In this environment teachers and students are able to focus on the content they are learning. The result of this pedagogy is that teachers are able “to teach all day” “to the last day.”



## Conclusion and Recommendations

The McKay offers a model for how to become an integral part of a community. Its vision is one of service both to the community and to parents. The school also models for the district what it means to understand Latino history, culture and language in positive ways that strengthen the education of Latino students. The McKay offers a complete curriculum that engages students in the arts, music, sports and academics. English Language Learners are welcomed at the school.

The McKay has the school culture and climate and instructional framework necessary to continue strengthening its academic performance. We understand that teachers and administrators continue to focus on curriculum and instruction to improve their performance in the MCAS. By the eighth grade 57% of the Latino students are in the Advanced and Proficient categories in the MCAS with only 3% failing in ELA. In the eighth grade 61% of the Latino students are in the Advanced and Proficient Categories in Math, with 9% failing. In the fourth grade, MCAS scores are very different, which may reflect the development of English Language Proficiency of students. Fourth-grade MCAS scores are 27% Advanced and Proficient for ELA and 12% failing; for Math, MCAS scores are 24% Advanced and Proficient and 17% failing. We suggest that through collaborations with institutions of higher education, research be done to ascertain the validity of the MCAS as a measure of ELL academic performance.

By way of a recommendation we see the need to incorporate the lunchroom into the culture and rhythm of the school, as it seemed disconnected from the orderly and peaceful environment we experienced at the school.

## TRUE TO THEIR WORD

### How Fenway High School Lives Its Beliefs And Values

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For twenty-four years, Fenway High School has been guided by the same mission: “to create a socially committed and morally responsible community of learners, which values its students as individuals.” Stemming from the mission are the School Motto (“Work Hard, Be Yourself, Do the Right Thing”) and the Safety Guidelines.<sup>9</sup> The mission provides theoretical guidance for community members explaining *what* they believe in and *why*. The Habits of Mind, School Motto and Safety Guidelines provide the pedagogy telling them *how* they are going to fulfill and sustain the mission.

Fenway High School’s educational foundation—Mission, School Motto and Safety Guidelines— generate a clear and concise language to speak about all aspects of the school. Each and every member of the Fenway community we interviewed spoke this unique language fluently using it as a means of explaining the school and their experiences. Fenway’s success as an institution stems in large measure from the development of a foundation and shared language—a bridge—between adults and students that is useful, relevant and inspiring. Fenway’s educational foundation includes a vision and language to speak about a diverse community. The section in the Student-Parent Handbook titled “Community Expectations and Policies: Respect for Diversity” gives the following description of the school:

*Fenway is a community that consists of people from many racial and ethnic backgrounds, a mix that reflects the diversity of the city of Boston. Fenway expects that each student will make an effort to get to know those from different cultures and backgrounds.*

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<sup>9</sup> **Habits of Mind:** Perspective; Evidence; Relevance; Connection; Supposition. **School Motto:** Work Hard, Be Yourself; Do the Right Thing; **Safety Guidelines:** Try it on; It’s OK to disagree; No shame, blame or attack; Take 100% responsibility; Group confidentiality

At Fenway respect for others is expected. Learning from each other is part of being at Fenway, and that extends to such matters as language, race, gender, sexual orientation, religions, and other traditions. Our curriculum honors diversity through the topics we study and the questions we ask. Fenway's consciousness of the importance of creating a diverse community and its connection to education create a social and intellectual space for all students, including Latinos.

There are 290 students at Fenway. This is the first year that Latino students exceed all other racial and ethnic groups in the ninth grade. Over the last 4 years there has been an increase in Latino students from 28% to 40%. We learned that it is the Latino students, not necessarily their families, who are choosing Fenway because of its reputation as a college preparatory school. This may account for the growth in numbers. Latino students succeed academically and socially at Fenway. Fifty eight percent of Latinos are in the Advanced and Proficient categories in the ELA part of the MCAS and 47% of Latinos were in the Advanced and Proficient categories in Math. We observed Latinos speaking with strong, articulate voices about their experiences and their future. Latino students feel ownership of their school and their education. They participate actively in classes and extracurricular activities and clubs, which in the case of the Latina Forum, they organized themselves. Latino students expressed pride in their academic success while acknowledging that this is an academically challenging school. They referred to teachers as part of their families and as their friends. As one Latino student told us, a teacher was his "first friend at Fenway," which resulted in his positive transition from middle school. Mothers spoke of teachers as members of their extended families. For example, a mother told us that a teacher "lo quiere como a su hijo" ("loves him like her son"). Another summarized the relation by telling us that students receive "mucho amor y mucho apoyo" (much love and support).

Two key areas create the conditions for Latinos to succeed academically and socially. First, the Mission, Core Values, Habits of Mind, School Motto and Safety Guidelines create an environment that is safe, nurturing and challenging for all students. Second, Fenway commits itself to creating a diverse community—a reflection of the city's diversity—providing evidence that highly functioning communities are committed to learning about each other's languages, races, gender, sexual orientation, religions and other traditions and to unlearning negative stereotypes can exist.

### Best Practices

- *Clarity and Relevance of Fenway's Educational Foundation*

Fenway's educational foundation is relevant to students' lives at the school and in the world. For example, a Latina student explains how *Doing the Right Thing* reminds students of the consequences of their actions: "If you find a cell phone in the bathroom and you like it, it's cool, you think you'd like to have it but you don't keep it because you do the right thing and think of the person who lost it. It may be your best friend." Another student explains the local, state and national implications of *Doing the Right Thing* when she recounts her participation in the school's effort to stop the deportation of one of their teachers. As a ninth grader this student did not know the teacher but felt it was "the right thing to do." Eileen Shakespear one of Fenway's founding teachers, shares how she implemented the school motto, *Work Hard*: "I show that I work hard through my: Sophomore advisory curriculum planning; 239 humanities class planning; Teaching and learning committee work; Mentoring BAA and Fenway interns. However, my favorite accomplishment this year was reviving the very dead Project week."<sup>10</sup>

A word often used by faculty and administrators to describe how they implement the educational foundation is "deliberate." Fenway's administrators and staff deliberately organize the school, create and sustain the climate and culture, and define instruction following the principles established in the foundation. The result is consistency and predictability. Students expect to be asked: what is your perspective? what is your evidence? Students can anticipate that there will be consequences for not working hard or doing the right thing. For members of the Fenway community the educational foundation is an effective compass telling them what is required, the potential problems and risks ahead and what may be possible.

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<sup>10</sup><http://fenway.boston.k12.ma.us/school/EShakespear/Work%20Hard%20Final%20Advisory%20page.htm>

- *The Strength of a Small and Diverse Community*

Students, teachers and administrators make the connection between being a small school and being able to “break down barriers and stereotypes” which allow them to build a community where everyone is accepted. Adults and students believe that the key to students’ success is that adults are able to know them as individuals. As a member of the Student Support Team told us, “the message they want all students to get is: “People invest in me ... people see my potential ... people believe in me.” A Latina student confirms this view when she tells us that at Fenway it does not matter if she is Latina.” She explains that Fenway students can get along with different cultures and when necessary get immediate help and feedback because the school is small. Both an adult and a student offered a similar analysis. The size of the school, according to an adult, “helps make it supportive to all and reduces development of ethnic sub-groups.” A Latino student reaffirmed this view by explaining that in a larger environment “people develop cliques, often by ethnicity.” The staff at Fenway resists identifying students by their ethnicity. This gives students the freedom to choose identities based on how they see themselves and not based on how the world sees them. In this way, Fenway lives its mission. However, the immediate affinity resulting when students find others with whom they share a common language and culture is powerful. We observed students moving between English and Spanish freely, speaking about their cultures with ease, and being part of a school where negative stereotypes associated with being Latinos are clearly rejected.

Fenway creates the conditions for strong relations to develop between faculty, staff and students and between students by developing a range of communities varying in size and focus. All of these communities are linked together by a shared mission, the School Motto and the Safety Guidelines. Fenway consists of three “Houses” or learning groups—Omega, Phoenix and Crossroads—each of which has its own faculty and student support staff. Houses have approximately 100 students with students typically remaining in the same House from ninth through eleventh grades. Houses are further divided into Advisories, which are small groups of 23-25 students focusing on a range of subjects ranging from peer interaction, health and safety in an urban environment, college applications and career choices. The range of communities creates different avenues for students to develop relations with adults and with each other.

Teachers and administrators together with students create safe spaces to engage in the process of defining positive and successful identities—Being Yourself. These spaces take the form of clubs such Boys to Men; Men, Organized, Responsible and Educated (MORE); Sister 2 Sister; Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). Oftentimes students create these clubs. For example, when a Latina student feels she needs a space to speak about the unique challenges facing Latinas she creates a group which is immediately supported by the school. Cultural assemblies also offer students the opportunity to share their history, culture and language with the whole school.

Creating a diverse community is hard work and requires careful thinking. Fenway approaches the challenge by moving on two tracks simultaneously. There is a deep and constant focus on the individual’s social and academic needs and an equally concentrated effort on developing and supporting the individual’s social and academic strengths. Simultaneously they create and sustain a range of communities that are safe and accepting of differences. This complex, labor-intensive approach generates the culture and climate which is evidently conducive to academic success.

- *Teaching and Learning*

The mission of the school to create “a socially committed and morally responsible community of learners” that values academic excellence finds expression in the classroom as follows.

- *Power in the Classroom*

There is no ambiguity as to who has the power to teach: teachers at Fenway are in full, moral and intellectual command of the classroom space. The power and confidence of the teachers generate safety and predictability in

the classroom. In a safe and predictable classroom teachers are able create the conditions for a community of learners to emerge.

- *Process and Rhythm*

In every class we attended we found a consistent process and rhythm. As students enter the classroom they greet each other and their teachers. Soon thereafter the teachers begin the class. The rules of the game are explicit and strict, yet these seem to make sense to students who are then able to concentrate on the content. For example, parents and students sign the Humanities syllabus which not only outlines the content of the course but also becomes an informal contract between teacher, student and family. The expectation is that all parties will meet the requirements outlined in the syllabus. Because these classes are so carefully structured, behavior issues are minimal. If students interrupt or are being silly they tend to correct each other (often with humor) getting the class back on track.

- *Teacher and Student Collaboration*

We observed seamless and effective team teaching which models for students the process of working collaboratively and independently. Teacher talk is concise leaving most of the class time for group or individual work. Teachers constantly monitor student work. They may choose to participate in group discussions by asking or answering questions or they may focus on the work of individual students.

Most of the teams of teachers we observed were diverse. For example, in one classroom we found an African-American teacher, a European-American teacher and a Latino student intern. These collaborations reflect the school's value of diversity and its connection with education.

- *Relevant Instruction*

A Latina echoed the sentiment of students at Fenway when she told us, "We learn about relevant issues." For example, we found students engaged in answering the question "How do we strive for and achieve *our* American dream?" The process of answering this question takes students into topics such as the industrial revolution, workers' rights and immigration to name a few. In one class we observed students engaged in a sophisticated comparison of the work of Karl Marx and Ayn Rand. When a student said that Rand was selfish, the teacher asked her to consider whether this was her bias or if there was evidence in the text.

Students examine issues of immediate importance such as the MCAS, which in a class we observed turned into a discussion of the effectiveness of standardized testing and the validity of the No Child Left Behind Act. Instead of muffling the students' views the teacher addressed their analysis and concerns while pointing out that they would need to pass this test regardless of its fairness. Students also engage issues of long-term relevance. For example, for one of their courses students are asked to prepare a presentation about their lives over the next 20 years. This exercise requires considering the personal choices they will need to make today given their dreams for the future.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

To the untrained eye Fenway may feel like a warm and fuzzy place. It is far from it. Upon closer examination one finds a careful balance between a caring community and a strict and demanding organization. The clarity and consistency with which Fenway defines itself result in setting of boundaries that are time tested by experienced administrators and faculty. The result is that students have very little room to maneuver in areas such as the Safety Guidelines. These are not an invitation but a requirement. However, the space to grow socially and intellectually is unbounded. Faculty and staff deliberately create a highly functioning diverse community where negative stereotypes are addressed and learning about each other is required. In this community Latino students tell us they find both the nurturing and the challenging academic environment which brought them to Fenway.

Fenway will benefit from developing deep, professional knowledge about the histories of the Latino nations present at their school and making connections between this new knowledge and instruction. Exploration of research on Latino adolescent development will provide a framework for deepening the school's understanding and effectiveness with this population. Additionally there is growing literature on the contribution of Latinos in the United States. Knowledge of this literature will help Latino students develop a positive image of who they are and how Latinos have contributed to the wellbeing of the country. By addressing these areas Fenway will strengthen and deepen its commitment to being a diverse, socially involved and morally responsible community of learners.

## **RISE AND FALL TOGETHER: Nurturing and Challenging at Tech Boston Academy**

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Tech Boston Academy lives by its essential belief that “every student can learn and develop into a responsible citizen by providing an environment that is both nurturing and challenging.” The school organization, culture, climate and instruction exemplify this basic belief, and student success pivots on it. Therefore, Tech Boston sees it as its mission to identify what students need to learn and provide them with the structures and mechanisms by which this learning can happen. Teachers and staff at Tech Boston know the gaps in the education of each student prior to his or her first day at the school. After students are admitted (by lottery) to the school, each student's academic record is analyzed carefully. This analysis of the students' academic development generates the setup of whatever academic and social support the school deems necessary for each student to succeed in high school. The school uses a range of strategies to support and monitor student progress, including the Learning Center, peer tutoring and Edline/Gradequick (a database used by teachers, students and families to monitor student grades and attend to areas of academic need as they surface). A unique feature of Tech Boston is its use of “technology [which] provides the bridge that connects students to his/her learning.” Faculty and students do not need to have a background in technology to attend Tech Boston but they must be willing to learn. Students take classes in IT Essentials, MOS, web design and digital art leading to industry certification. All students have laptops and they are exposed to smart boards, graphing calculators, scanners, digital cameras and video editing.

The school culture and climate at Tech Boston are grounded in its school motto, *Rise and Fall Together*, which makes it the responsibility of every member of the school community—teachers, staff and students—to make certain that all students succeed. As we were told, at this school “It is cool to achieve”; everyone is expected to go to college. Toward this end the school proposes that everyone needs to be accountable not only for their individual success but also for the success of the whole school.

Latino students at Tech Boston are described as “talented.” The Chief Administration Officer, Mr. Love, tells us that “Latinos in this generation are working their butts off.” He explains that many have responsibilities outside of school such as babysitting, cooking and paying the rent.” Still, Latinos attending Tech Boston have “high expectations.” Latinos, who constitute 29% of the school population, succeed academically and socially: in 2005, 55% of Latinos were in the Advanced and Proficient category in the MCAS and 41% in Mathematics. Of the 34 Adams Scholars 15 are Latinos.<sup>11</sup> One Latino student we met is a class officer and another is the president of the senior class. These students attribute their success to their teachers and families. The teachers “really care” and “have our back.” This, they point out, was not their experience in middle school nor is it the experience of Latino students they know at other schools in the district. One student told us (and others agreed) that “my parents always tell me ‘We want you to succeed more than us.’” In turn, Latino students recognize the sacrifices their parents make for them and want to share the fruits of their success with their families. “I want to buy my mom a home,” said a young man. In this environment of high expectations and hopes for the future, the perception of students is that “the Latino culture is becoming stronger.”

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<sup>11</sup> Adams scholarship is based on a student's performance on the Grade 10 English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments of MCAS.

Two key areas create the conditions for Latinos to succeed academically and socially at Tech Boston. First, administrators, teachers and staff pride themselves in knowing their students' academic needs as well as their social-emotional needs. They do this through analysis of the data and by establishing close relations with them. The headmaster, Mrs. Mary Skipper, adds a critical dimension to the process of knowing their students when she tells us that faculty and staff

*... believe that students have a lot of solutions to their own problems in school, but that they are rarely asked about those questions. That is one of the reasons why they try to speak to students and have an open channel of communication at all times. Intervention means that the school has to do something different too, not only the expectation that the student or the family is going to change. This also implies more responsibility from the part of the school.*

She adds, "Kids are good at reminding us what they need." The result of analyzing academic data, knowing a student's social-emotional needs, and listening to students identify problems and solutions (with the understanding that the school may need to change) is a strong bond between students and adults which generates academic and social success for students. Second, the implementation of the school motto, *Rise and Fall Together* in daily interactions at the school provides students with an effective system of personal and collective accountability that unites the community around the shared goal of having students succeed. When students miss school, other students will take on the responsibility of finding out what is happening to the student. Students who fall behind in their work or need additional support may go to the Learning Center and work with a trained peer tutor. Teachers will repeat over and over again that they are available after school to work with students, and many students take advantage of this opportunity. A community that values taking care of each other and offering support to those in need is one where Latino students thrive, as this is a cultural value that emerges from a socio-centric orientation and is found across Latino populations of different regional origins.

## Best Practices

- ***Shared Leadership Model***

A precondition for Tech Boston's success is having an organization capable of supporting its shared goals. Tech Boston has a "shared leadership model" meant to reinforce the process of "collegial decision making." The leadership includes three administrators focused on discreet areas: the Headmaster (grants and external relations), Chief Academic Officer (technology and academic curriculum) and Chief Administrator Officer (discipline, student leadership, social emotional issues). The organizing principle is that the headmaster provides the resources and the teachers provide the structure. As we were told, this is a "teacher-run school," meaning that great value is given to teachers' leadership. For example, teachers decided what five main components to highlight in their lesson plans and they all use the same format across the board. The components are: objective; technology objective; agenda; outcome; homework. As we observed different classrooms, we confirmed that every teacher had these five components (with very slight variation) up on their front boards. The school has department liaisons, not heads, again as a sign of collegiality. Administrators and department liaisons meet weekly and in these meetings "everybody proposes changes, everybody has a stake, and they are always open to new ideas." In the faculty senate all decisions are voted. The Student Support team focuses on both the academic and social-emotional needs of students and helps build and sustain teacher-student-family relations. In hiring new teachers attention is given, not only to content knowledge but also to the ability to balance nurturing and challenging relations with students. New teachers must be willing and able to work collaboratively with others and learn about the technology used at the school. Most importantly, new teachers need to adopt the mission and culture of the school.

By developing a shared leadership model Tech Boston is able to function efficiently and effectively. Each member of the school has a clearly defined role within the organization and understands that adopting the essential belief, vision and culture of the school is required.

We were told repeatedly that being a pilot school with autonomy makes a difference, as the school is able to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, budget and hiring. This gives the organization the ability to make

decisions in critical areas which they are then able to align with the essential beliefs, vision and culture of the school. This close alignment between the foundational beliefs and the organization of the school allows administrators and faculty to focus on the goal of having students succeed. Importantly, students see in the school organization a model of how they are expected to work collaboratively. In the same manner that administrators, teachers and staff organize themselves, sharing goals and objectives and being accountable to each other so too are students educated to rise and fall together.

- *Rise and Fall Together*

A Latino student explained that at Tech Boston, “students watch over each other; it is more a school thing, not a Latino thing.” Indeed the school motto, *Rise and Fall Together*, is implemented school-wide, defining the social culture of the school as well as providing a powerful support for instruction. The fact that Tech Boston is a small school of 375 students facilitates students knowing each other. This is a necessary condition but it is not sufficient. What makes Tech Boston unique is the intentional development of a productive peer culture. The reasoning behind building a peer culture is simple: “They believe that students will listen to other students and they encourage these relationships.” The expectation on the part of faculty and administrators is that students support each other in school and in their neighborhoods.

Students and faculty gave us examples and we observed how a productive peer culture defines school relations. For example, a group of girls took on the responsibility of having another student come to school every day. If he did not come they would call home. In another instance a student who spent a month in a coma following a car crash found the support of students who “rallied and pulled him through.” Now that he has returned to school students will let the headmaster know they are concerned when he misses more than two days. There is a discipline component in the development of a strong peer culture. Students told us, “If any freshman makes a mistake, it’s everybody’s mistake.” The advice they give each other is to “be strong and focus on school, leave your friends for later.” The idea that there are collective consequences for individual mistakes gives credence to the notion of falling together and puts to the test the ability of students to rise together. Students tell us that by senior year they are a very close community and that after graduation students come back to support the school.

There is an instructional component to the creation of a peer culture that makes Tech Boston a model for other schools. We heard often that there is an expectation that students will be educated to work in teams and that teachers are expected to encourage students to work with each other. Whenever freshmen and seniors are together, mentoring is encouraged. For example, there is a program in which seniors help freshmen. Other inter-age interactions happen in classes like history and science where grades are blended. This culture of mentoring and tutoring culminates with the Learning Center, which uses a peer tutoring model to provide tutoring for 140 students. Students may be referred by their teachers, or students may choose to seek tutoring. Peer tutoring is a process which they believe also helps the tutor, since “the highest level of knowing is teaching.” The Learning Center offers students the most current data on their academic work—homework assignments, tests, and grades—which results in tutors and students being able to target very specific areas of academic needs as these emerge.

The ability to develop a peer culture which impacts social relations and instruction while making students accountable for their individual and their collective performance are added dimensions to the benefits of a small school. Being small allows Tech Boston to develop a peer culture strengthened by productive social and academic bonds.

- *“We Know Our Kids”*

There is clarity at Tech Boston as to what it means to know their students. Great effort and careful thought are given to the academic needs of students, and the faculty and staff recognize that to be able to educate youth they must establish close, affective relations with students. These close, affective relations are described as “tough love,” since teachers and administrators seek to create a balance between being nurturing and being challenging.

Students, we were told, “like to know that there is a safety net.” This safety net includes their socio-emotional needs as well as their academic ones.

A member of Student Support describes the process of building a support system—a safety net—for students. The process of building a social safety net begins “by finding a connection—someone the student can trust—and then you start building.” The process continues by giving students ownership of their own learning process and giving them choices so that they are able to make their own decisions with the understanding that the decisions they make will have consequences. Building teacher-student-family connections becomes an essential component of creating a safety net for students. Tech Boston provides students with a support system that makes them feel safe, protected, and respected. In turn, students are expected to take care of each other and be respectful. A Latino student gave us an example of showing respect, saying that when a teacher asked students to speak in English in the class, they “respected that.” Students speak Spanish freely but in this instance, there was a respectful request which was met with equal respect.

An example of administrators and faculty knowing their students and taking the time to exhibit this knowledge is displayed prominently in the bulletin board at the entrance of the school. Here one finds essays about the “Student of the Month Chosen by a Teacher.” For example one of the essays says: “Excellent focus in class, positive attitude, and strong class participation. He is a star.” It continues describing the student’s “honesty and team oriented attitude.” Another essay reads, “Every morning she is at the coffee shop with a smile on her face. Enormous change in his work ethic and attitude.”

It is evident that at Tech Boston students feel cared for and supported. The hallways are evidence of strong relations between adults and students who have on-going, relaxed conversations not only about academics but also about other important things in students’ lives ranging from sports, health and family to visits to the immigration office and applications for college.

Administrators and faculty begin the process of knowing their students academically before they arrive in the ninth grade. They look at the students’ records comprehensively including their demographic data and their strengths and weaknesses. They also speak with students to understand what has happened in their education. After evaluating each student they identify the support services that need to be in place. If, for example, a student is an English Language Learner even if not formally identified, they will put the support systems in place for the student. Expectations of students are high and interventions immediate. As we were told, teachers “don’t accept any less than 100% engagement in class.” If a student is not working, this is addressed immediately and the student is taken out of class. At that point the student is asked, “What’s going on? Do you need extra support?”

We observed this happening in a class where a student was lying on his desk. The teacher and student walked outside the classroom for a few minutes. After speaking with the student, the teacher came back and the student followed soon after. The issue was resolved quickly without causing an incident or being disruptive. The expectation is the same for homework. We heard teachers repeatedly offering to meet students during office hours; formally these are one day a week, but we were told that teachers stay after school almost every day. Teachers will do a great deal of homework scaffolding and students are able to stay for Homework Hall until 4:00pm every day but we were told students stay longer. The expectation is that students will do their homework. If students do not produce the work, parents are brought in. In this manner students are first held accountable and if this does not work families are asked to help.

The faculty and administrators at Tech Boston do the homework of knowing each and every student’s academic and socio-emotional needs. They create a customized structure of support as well as providing additional support for all students by teachers after school, the Learning Center and the Homework Hall. Students are held accountable for using the supports available to them to succeed academically.

- *The School Shapes Its Own Instruction*

Instruction at Tech Boston is traditional and project-based, with computers as the main bridge to learning. The school uses Interdisciplinary Projects to give students an opportunity to integrate major curriculum areas on a given



topic. Teachers and staff value the designation of the school as a “pilot school” because this gives them freedom to choose to adopt citywide curricular materials they find valuable and also to develop their own curriculum. This flexibility allows the school to differentiate instruction based on what they know about each student, to make learning “fun” by connecting it to students’ daily lives (e.g. math problems presented in the format of a game show), and to begin approaching relevant social issues. We saw class discussions of “sweatshop” workers and about the devastating effect of being unable to attain one’s dreams with Langston Hughes’s “A dream deferred.”

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Tech Boston is a pilot school created in 2002, making it a relatively new organization. The success of Tech Boston is evidence of the possibilities that exist when administrators and teachers have the ability to envision a school from beginning to end. All the critical elements that make a school—the essential belief, the school motto, the organization, the school culture and climate, instruction and relations with families—are in alignment. Furthermore, faculty and administrators have the power to make decisions to strengthen the school they envisioned. At Tech Boston there is safety and predictability for all members of the school as the roles, responsibilities and expectations are clear to one and all. The environment, which is characterized by order and caring relations, sustains rigorous academics. The academic success of the school is well known to Latinos who recruit friends and relatives to come to the school. Here they are asked to take care of each other as if they were a family. Latinos excel and immediately buy into the notion that at Tech Boston students rise and fall together. The respect students get from adults and other students and their ability to have their voices heard and their views taken into consideration generate a productive culture of achievement where it is “cool” to succeed.

Students tell us that they would like a greater variety of courses such as drama, cooking and dance to name a few. Our hope is that schools are able to support the range of interests students have as these create new and exciting ways of knowing for students. They also told us that they would like the school to have its own building as they feel the space is “too constraining.”

Posters and aphorisms on classroom walls point to an overall awareness about the current social circumstances of students at Tech Boston, but not so much about the historical experiences that encouraged their families to leave their home countries. The school seems comfortable not imparting knowledge about public figures who have made a difference in the students’ countries of origin and whose messages may be relevant to them now.

We recommend that students be involved in thinking about the curriculum as we anticipate that together with teachers and administrators they will continue building on the success of this school. As a pilot school with a focus on technology, the spectrum of curriculum materials that can be brought into the classroom through the Internet is endless. The school knows the academic needs of the students very well, but does not know so much about the histories of their families, especially those who have immigrated recently. It may be beneficial to create mechanisms for teachers and administrators to learn more about the specific groups of Latinos present at the school. Teachers and other school staff might start formally discussing their knowledge of students and their families to identify culturally shared beliefs and behaviors and begin developing consistent strategies to build on strengths and to control risks.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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This research project confirms for us the analysis of Nel Noddings (1998, 1992) about schools that adopt an “ethic of caring” or a “relational ethic” (1998, p 218). This ethic emerges from relationships between administrators and teachers and between teachers and students that aim at promoting the growth of those who are cared for, not only their academic success. In an environment that has an ethic of caring, those who receive the care feel it. Students are treated with respect and consideration, teaching moments are used as caring occasions, there is abundant dialogue and teachers are willing to spend additional time with students.

The unique pathways that each school has taken to make operational this ethic of care as well as to create and sustain pathways leading to academic success remind us of Nieto (1999) and Barth (1991) when they argue that educational reform can only happen in schools—one school at a time. Nieto makes the point that “[a] step-by-step blueprint for school reform is both inappropriate and untenable because each school differs from all others in its basic structure, goals, and human dimensions” (p. 175). As a society we strongly desire, for the sake of the students, that districts could impose changes externally so as to transform schools rapidly. From our vantage point, externally imposed solutions will continue to generate frustration and lack of success. We see the road ahead as long and difficult yet hopeful.

Barth (1991) argues that “the greater promise for school reform—and sufficient resources to achieve it—now resides within the schools. Change in schools may be initiated from without, but the most important and most lasting change will come from within” (p. 159). Each school we visited, like all others in the district, has its own history, vision of education, organization, culture and ways of relating with each other. For lasting change to happen there needs to be an understanding that change will only be possible within the unique context of each school. Barth adds that schools face the decision that they either “...propel themselves in some direction, be towed, or sink” (p. 152). Through the work we have done with five schools in the district we hope to contribute a vision of a destination, or at least an intermediate state, that other schools may use in re-thinking and implementing new strategies that draw upon the strengths of Latino students and their families to veer them toward academic success. Time is of the essence if we want to avoid massive failure among this student population.

As our research unfolded we began to see that teachers and administrators at the schools we examined had the organizational capacity, the school culture and climate and the instructional know-how to address new challenges and obstacles. It is the combination of all of these elements that may explain why they have been able to face the challenge of the MCAS while other schools continue to struggle. While we may wish otherwise—that distinct strategies or practices might result in success—we end this research with a deeper understanding of the complexity of transforming schools. Not understanding the scope of the challenge will continue to derail our efforts.

Given our understanding of how long-lasting change happens in districts (at the school level) and how the whole school needs to participate in the process of change if it is to be effective (which means transforming the organization, school culture and climate, curriculum and instruction and family and community relations), instead of offering distinct recommendations and strategies that address the problem in a piecemeal fashion, we propose a comprehensive and in-depth process for addressing the challenge of successfully educating Latino students.

The rubric we used to conduct this research provides schools with an excellent tool to engage in a thorough process of self-assessment with a specific focus on the education of Latino students. [See Appendix 2] By way of an example we use one benchmark in the rubric and propose how the process might generate a plan of action. The rubric establishes the following benchmark in the area of curriculum and instruction: “Teachers are knowledgeable about cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic and special needs characteristics that affect learning and capitalize upon students’ backgrounds when designing curriculum to meet individual learning needs.” Evidence of a school meeting this benchmark can be found when “explicit connections are made between Latino students’ linguistic,

cultural and ethnic backgrounds and curricular topics.” Evidence of these connections may be found in formative assessments, texts and materials, classroom observations and teacher dialogues. Determining that this is an area of weakness would generate a plan of action that determines how this weakness will be addressed.

Schools having a culture of collaboration may leverage the knowledge of teachers already in the building about this student population and they may choose to make this topic a unit of analysis in all instructional dialogues. Schools not having a culture of collaboration throughout the building may still be able to identify pockets of collaboration among teachers from which to start building a plan of action. Creating a culture of collaboration is an ongoing process that requires analysis, identification and implementation of change. For this purpose, it would serve the district to make available to schools a number of external resources specifically focused on the education of Latino students. Examples might include websites, professional development opportunities, and partnerships with academic and community institutions for the specific purpose of deepening the connection between the students’ cultural, racial and linguistic needs and the curriculum. The goal is to implement a plan of action across grades and disciplines. Measurable outcomes need to be identified so as to evaluate the implementation process.

The teachers and principals we interviewed are clear that the root causes of poor educational outcomes are the schools (organization, culture and climate), the curriculum and instruction and the lack of resources—not the supposed inherent deficits of Latino students or their families. It seems to us that the reason these schools succeed in educating their students is that teachers and administrators define the problem in a manner that gives them the power to resolve it. Because they are able to see that part of the problem is in their school, they can identify the source and address it; because they can see that part of the problem is in the curriculum, they can revise, supplement or redesign it; and because they understand the problems generated by lack of resources they are empowered to seek out partnerships with organizations and identify potential donors. The reward for these schools’ hard work is a sense of collective competence and pride in knowing that they are giving their students a fair chance to succeed academically and socially.

A group of teachers in one of the schools we visited captured the essence of their challenge when they told us, “If our students fail, we fail. If they succeed we succeed.” In these good schools, teachers and administrators take their full share of responsibility for student failure and simply do not tolerate low expectations for Latino and African American students’ academic outcomes. This commitment to high expectations requires that administrators and teachers authentically believe that all students, including Latino students, have the capacity to learn. It also requires that they see the families as able partners in the education of students. While transforming negative perceptions and biases into a positive and empowering belief that Latino students can succeed academically and socially is difficult, it is necessary and urgent.

In all but one of the schools we visited, the number of Latino administrators, teachers and staff is very small. In some instances there is one Latino staff member and no Latino teachers. At others, Latino teachers are a small minority of the teaching staff, despite the high number of Latino students at the school. The result is that Latino families searching for support from Latino personnel often overwhelm the few who are able to help them. Most importantly, instructional dialogues focused on the education of Latino students are devoid of the knowledge and input of Latino faculty and administrators. This will continue to generate critical gaps in the relation between schools and Latino students and their families.

We conclude this research with the understanding that there is tentativeness, even reluctance, to share the assumptions and frameworks that inform the work of teachers and administrators with Latino students and their families. Perhaps, a meaningful way to involve Latino families at this point is to engage them in conversations that help teachers and administrators deepen their knowledge about Latino families’ histories, cultures and languages. Respectful outreach to Latino families, followed by the development of deep, professional knowledge about the histories of the Latin American nations present at the school, will support the academic achievement of Latino youth. Equipped with deeper knowledge about Latinos in the district, teachers and administrators will be in a better position to fill the spaces of silence with the research done thus far on Latino education in the United States. Schools in the district not only need to develop deep, professional knowledge about the histories of the Latin American nations present at their school, but also make connections between this new knowledge and instruction.

Furthermore, exploration of strength-based research on Latino children and adolescent development will provide a framework for deepening the schools' understanding and effectiveness with this population. Finally, there is growing literature on the contribution of Latinos in the United States. By addressing these areas, schools will strengthen and deepen their commitment to being a diverse, socially involved and morally responsible community of learners.

Our recommendations address fundamental areas that will need to be examined if schools are to succeed in educating Latino students: 1) filling the spaces of silence with research on Latino education; 2) infusing instructional dialogues and strengthening relations with Latino families with the knowledge and input of experienced and proven Latino faculty and administrators; 3) shifting from a deficit to a strength perspective. This requires transforming negative beliefs and perceptions into a positive and empowering approach that builds on Latino students' already existing academic and social strengths. This transformation is hard work as it asks that teachers and administrators carefully examine their core assumptions and subtle biases. It is also contingent upon knowing and understanding the students' families, their histories, their strengths and weaknesses and the specific contributions they can make to school and community. Moreover, each one of these fundamental areas requires paying attention to the school as a whole and transforming structures, curriculum, instruction and relations. We are fully aware of the challenge of transforming whole schools. However, by examining five schools in the district—the Bradley, O'Donnell, McKay, Fenway and Tech Boston—we hope to have provided concrete evidence that change is possible and success attainable in the Boston Public Schools.

With this research we hope to generate a dialogue in the Latino community as to the education of Latino children. The silences surrounding Latinos—their history, culture and language is intense. While schools may recognize and celebrate Latino culture there are serious gaps in knowledge and understanding of Latino students and their families—their countries of origin, the history of Latinos in the United States, the contributions to the wealth of the nation and to its social and political ethos. We wonder: how does it feel to be educated in silence—about your culture, about your history, your language and your identity? When and how do students sense that something is missing? Is a good yet silent school good enough for Latino students? When do Latino families require that schools know, understand, and teach the very long history of Latinos in the United States? When do we assume that an educated Latino youth knows where they come from, how their ancestors struggled and continue to do so, who they are as historical, political and social beings?

In 2000, there were 35.3 million Latinos, 13% of the total U.S. population; by 2020 the Latino population is projected to double to 70 million, or 21% of the U.S. population. Given this, we can only assume that the political power of Latinos will increase and with this power the possibility of asking difficult questions and expecting concrete answers. The question for Latino families and educators of all races and ethnicities may be: How do we, together, develop a vision of what is required of schools that educate Latino students? How do Latino families hold schools accountable for educating Latino youth?

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## Appendix 1: Schedule of School Visits.

<u>Day One</u>	
8:15	Arrival of Team & Preparation
9:00-12:00	Classroom Visits
12:00-1:00	Team Working Lunch in the Conference Room
1:00-3:00	Classroom Visits
1: 00-2:05	Leadership Team Focus Group
2:20-3:00	Student Support Focus Group
3:30-4:30	Team Debriefing with Administrator
<u>Day Two</u>	
8:15	Arrival of Team & Preparation
9:00-12:00	Student Government & School Partners & Parents & Latino Organization
12:00-1:00	Team Working Lunch in the Conference Room
1:20-3:00	Classroom Visits
1: 20-2:05	Special Education Staff (members able to attend)
2:20-3:00	Student Government & School Partners (if present at school) & Parents & Latino Organization
3:30-4:30	Team Debriefing with Administrator

We conducted three levels of analysis.

- 1) The first level of data analysis helped us produce a working definition of academic and social success as it relates to the education of Latino students. This helped us answer the question: *How can schools where Latino students are succeeding academically and socially be defined and described?*
- 2) The second level of analysis aided us in identifying the characteristics of schools where Latino students excel. This generated a framework to guide our preparation of the school's analysis and answer the question: *What are the characteristics of schools where Latino students are succeeding academically and socially?*
- 3) The third level of analysis focused on highlighting the uniqueness of each school and identifying best practices that should be examined by other district schools. We recognize that each school is a universe with a unique mission and vision, organization and decision-making process, culture, relationships and discourses. While we identified the shared characteristics that define and describe schools where Latino students are succeeding academically and socially, we were mindful of capturing the uniqueness of each school. This helped us answer the question: *What can families, teachers and administrators learn from schools that are succeeding in educating Latino students?*

We used the following process to address validity threats. A team of researchers checked the data (collection and interpretation) for factual accuracy as well as for interpretative bias. At every point in the research process two or more researchers evaluated the accuracy and coherence in the interpretation of the data. Whenever there were discrepancies between researchers, other researchers from the Gastón Institute reviewed the data and made recommendations.

Given the nature of this project where our expressed objective was to produce change in BPS schools and in the district in general, we used Lather's (1986) emphasis on the little-known theory of catalytic validity. She explains that "catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, a process Freire (1973) terms "*conscientization*" (p. 68). For this research to reorient, focus and energize others in the district, participants in the study needed to recognize its validity. As Maxwell (1992) asserts, "an account is only valid if the actors are able to confirm or recognize the findings of the research" (p. 287). The success or failure of this research project rests with the schools we examined and their recognition of our work as accurate, fair and helpful. This process should help ensure that others in the district will find in it the guidance necessary to transform teaching and learning for Latino students.



## Appendix 2: School Success in Latino/a Education, A Rubric for Assessing Schools<sup>12</sup>

1. ARTICULATION OF VISION AND EXPECTATIONS	EVIDENCE	SCHOOL EVIDENCE
<p>The school has a clearly articulated vision and expectations that are inclusive of all students.</p> <p>Vision and expectations reflect an understanding of the expectations and needs of Latino/a students, families and community members.</p>	<p>Internal and external documents articulate a clear vision and expectations that includes Latino/a students in general education and English Language Learners in all programs.</p> <p>Teachers, administrators and families understand and implement the vision and expectations of the school.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) School Mission &amp; Vision</li> <li>2) School Governance Documents</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews</u></p> <p>Interview Protocol: teachers, administrators and families</p>
2. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION & DECISION MAKING	EVIDENCE	SCHOOL EVIDENCE
<p><b>School organization and decision making process:</b> Sustained and effective discussion of issues pertaining to Latino/a students in general education and English Language Learners in all programs takes place across organizations and teams.</p>	<p>Latino/a and ELL issues (culture and climate, instruction, family and community) are integrated in all school organizations and teams: Board, School Site Council, ILT, grade level meetings and content meetings.</p> <p>Teams of teachers and administrators discuss in an on-going and effective manner the academic achievement of Latinos/as and English Language Learners.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Plan for closing the achievement gap for Latinos/as and English Language Learners is in place and being implemented.</li> <li>2) School Quality Review</li> <li>3) In-Depth Review</li> <li>4) School Governance Documents</li> <li>5) Professional Development Plan</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews with teachers &amp; administrators</u></p> <p>Interview Protocol: teachers, administrators and families</p>
<p><b>School leadership:</b> Latino/a teachers and administrators are included in all aspects of the decision making process.</p>	<p>Latino/a general education, SEI, TBE and Two-Way Bilingual teachers, staff and administrators are represented in all school organizations and teams.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) School Governance Documents</li> <li>2) Organizational Chart</li> </ol>

<sup>12</sup> We adapted elements of the rubric used in the Oregon Small School Initiative, which seeks to create small, equitable and high-achieving high schools throughout Oregon and is part of E3: Employers for Education Excellence ([www.E3oregon.org](http://www.E3oregon.org)) We also adapted elements of Boston's Center for Collaborative Education's rubric used in School Quality Reviews. Although both rubrics were developed for small schools and pilot schools, we have chosen them as the basis for this study as these represent where innovation and excellence in education are currently taking place in the nation and in the BPS.

3. SCHOOL CULTURE & CLIMATE	EVIDENCE	SCHOOL EVIDENCE
<p><b>School Culture:</b> School operates as a safe, positive, inclusive learning community where cooperation, respect and responsibility are the norm. Latino/a teachers and staff are an integral part of the learning community giving and receiving respect and cooperation.</p>	<p>Culture of the school is strengthened by the diversity of teachers, staff and administrators.</p> <p>The language and culture of Latino/a teachers, staff and administrators is seen as strengthening relations at the school.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) School Quality Review</li> <li>2) In-Depth Review</li> <li>3) School Governance Documents</li> <li>4) Professional Development Plan</li> <li>5) School Profile (teachers' race, attendance)</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers &amp; administrators</p> <p><u>Observations</u> Instructional Leadership Team; content area meetings; grade level meetings</p>
<p><b>School Climate:</b> School operates as a safe, positive, inclusive learning community where cooperation, respect and responsibility are the norm. Latino/a students are an integral part of the learning community giving and receiving respect and cooperation.</p>	<p>Culture of the school is strengthened by the diversity of students.</p> <p>The language and culture of Latino/a students is seen strengthening relations at the school.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) School attendance</li> <li>2) Suspensions</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: students</p> <p><u>Observations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Classrooms</li> <li>2) Student organizations</li> </ol>
4. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENTS	EVIDENCE	SCHOOL EVIDENCE
<p>All students have equal access to highly challenging curriculum that is relevant and connected to real life experiences.</p>	<p>Curriculum is highly challenging, relevant and connected with Latino/a real life experiences.</p> <p>Rigorous performance standards are upheld for students including Latino/a students in all classes.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Formative Assessment Data Summary</li> <li>1) Students' Portfolios; student work</li> <li>2) Curriculum: texts &amp; materials</li> <li>3) School Profiles (teachers' qualifications)</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers &amp; administrators</p> <p><u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction</p>
<p>Teachers are knowledgeable about cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic and special needs characteristics that affect learning and capitalize upon students' backgrounds when designing curriculum to meet individual learning needs.</p>	<p>Explicit connections are made between Latino/a students' linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and curricular topics.</p> <p>Relationships between Latino/a students, teachers and families reflect an understanding of the connection between language, culture and academic achievement.</p>	<p><u>Document Review</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Formative Assessment Data Summary</li> <li>2) Students' Portfolios; student work</li> <li>3) Curriculum: texts &amp; materials</li> </ol> <p><u>Interviews</u> Teachers, administrators and parents.</p> <p><u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction</p>

4. Continued	EVIDENCE	SCHOOL EVIDENCE
School has adopted and consistently employs a variety of engaging and effective pedagogies.	A range of pedagogies and assessments are used consistently and effectively. Pedagogies and assessments are informed by the language, culture and ethnicity of Latino/a students.	<u>Document Review</u> Curriculum: texts & materials <u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers & administrators <u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction
Specific attention given to unlearning negative self-stereotypes.	Curriculum and pedagogy specifically address issues of identity and negative stereotypes. The process of unlearning stereotypes is informed by an understanding of the language, culture and ethnicity of Latino/a students.	<u>Document Review</u> Curriculum: texts & materials <u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers & administrators <u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction
Instructional materials are differentiated to meet the needs of all learners.	A range of pedagogies is informed by the linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of Latino/a students.	<u>Document Review</u> Curriculum: texts & materials <u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers & administrators <u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction
Instruction is aligned with state and district standards and community expectations to prepare students for post-high school education.	Curriculum and pedagogy are aligned to prepare Latino/a students for college.	<u>Document Review</u> 1) Formative Assessment Data Summary 2) Students' Portfolios; student work 3) Curriculum: texts & materials <u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers & administrators <u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction
Students actively explore, research and solve complex problems to develop a deep understanding of core academic concepts.	Latino/a students actively explore, research and solve complex problems.	<u>Document Review</u> 1) Formative Assessment Data Summary 2) Students' Portfolios; student work 3) Curriculum: texts & materials <u>Interviews</u> Interview Protocol: teachers & administrators <u>Observations</u> Classroom instruction

## Appendix 3: School Profiles<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <http://boston.k12.ma.us/schools/profiles.asp>

## Manassah E. Bradley Elementary School

110 Beachview Rd, East Boston, MA 02128

617-635-8422

Anne Kelly, Principal

**Grades:** K0 - 5 **Hours:** 9:20am - 3:20pm

**Zone:** North Triad: A **Cluster:** 1

<p><b>Our School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer network in every classroom</li> <li>• Science and Computer Specialists</li> <li>• Advanced Work Classes in Grades 4 and 5</li> <li>• Member of East Boston Alliance</li> <li>• Inclusive instruction for SPED and ELLs</li> <li>• Departmentalizing in Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5</li> <li>• Community “Read Alouds” in all classes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our Students (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total enrollment: 241 students</p> <p>Black 6.6%</p> <p>Hispanic 50.6%</p> <p>White 34.9%</p> <p>Asian 5.0%</p> <p>Native American 2.9%</p> <p>Regular Education 87.5%</p> <p>Special Education 12.4%</p> <p>Bilingual Education 0.0%</p> <p>Average daily student attendance: 94.7%</p> <p>Students promoted to next grade: 95.0%</p> <p>Student mobility rate: 12.8%</p> <p>Annual student dropout rate: N/A</p> <p>Students suspended: 1</p> <p>Annual student dropout rate: N/A</p>
<p>Uniform Policy: Voluntary</p>	<p><b>Our Staff (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total staff: 23</p> <p>Black 8.7%</p> <p>Hispanic 4.3%</p> <p>White 87.0%</p> <p>Asian 0.0%</p> <p>Native American 0.0%</p> <p>Staff-to-student ratio: 1:14</p> <p>Average daily staff attendance: 97.1%</p> <p>Number of teachers: 17</p> <p>“Highly qualified” teachers: 100.0%</p> <p>Teachers licensed in Mass.: 100.0%</p> <p>Core academic courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers: 100.0%</p>
<p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston Ballet</li> <li>• Boston Public Library</li> <li>• Reading is Fundamental</li> <li>• The Coca-Cola Company</li> <li>• The U.S.S. Constitution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Awards, Honors and Distinctions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compass School Award, Department of Education, 2007</li> </ul>

**Hugh R. O'Donnell Elementary School**

**33 Trenton St, East Boston, MA 02128**

**617-635-8454**

**Dr. Robert Martin, Principal**

**Grades: K1 - 5 Hours: 9:25am - 3:25pm**

**Zone: North Triad: A Cluster: 1**

<p><b>Our School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AVID College Prep for All Students Grades 4&amp;5</li> <li>• After School On-Site Extended Day Prog. YMCA</li> <li>• SES Before and After School Tutoring</li> <li>• Adult Evening ESL Program for Parents</li> <li>• Technology Goes Home Family Computer</li> <li>• History Alive Social Studies Pilot Prog. K-5</li> <li>• School Lending and Computer Research Library</li> <li>• Art and Physical Education for all students</li> <li>• DIBELS Diagnostic Reading Assessment</li> <li>• Earthworks and Science Lab Instruction K-5</li> </ul> <p>Uniform Policy: Mandatory - The O'Donnell School's Uniform Policy requires students to wear a white golf shirt, with no insignia. Navy blue pants, skirts or shorts are required. Only sneakers are to be worn as footwear.</p>	<p><b>Our Students (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total enrollment: 235 students</p> <p>Black 4.3%</p> <p>Hispanic 68.1%</p> <p>White 21.7%</p> <p>Asian 4.7%</p> <p>Native American 1.3%</p> <p>Regular Education 89.7%</p> <p>Special Education 10.2%</p> <p>Bilingual Education 0.0%</p> <p>Average daily student attendance: 95.0%</p> <p>Students promoted to next grade: 95.7%</p> <p>Student mobility rate: 10.4%</p> <p>Annual student dropout rate: N/A</p>
<p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advancement Via Individual Determination Inc.</li> <li>• BPS Family &amp; Community Engagement Adult</li> <li>• District 7 Boston Police Safety Walk &amp; DARE</li> <li>• East Boston High School Mentoring Program</li> <li>• East Boston Social Center &amp; Health Center</li> <li>• Fitness Forward Health and Fitness Tech. Pro</li> <li>• John Silber Reading First Bay State Readers</li> <li>• Lesson One &amp; Earthworks East Boston Library</li> <li>• Time Warner &amp; Little, Brown Readers</li> <li>• YMCA SES Tutorial Alliance Program</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our Staff (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total staff: 22 Black 9.1%</p> <p>Staff-to-student ratio: 1:14 Average daily staff attendance: 95.1%</p> <p>Number of teachers: 17</p> <p>Black 9.1%</p> <p>Hispanic 0.0%</p> <p>White 90.9%</p> <p>Asian 0.0%</p> <p>Native American 0.0%</p> <p>"Highly qualified" teachers: 100.0%</p> <p>Teachers licensed in Mass.: 97.0%</p> <p>Core academic courses taught by "highly qualified" teachers: 100.0%</p>
<p><b>Awards, Honors and Distinctions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate Yearly Progress ELA, Mass. Dept. of Education, 2004</li> <li>• Just for Kids Award MCAS ELA Improvement, Massachusetts Business Alliance, 2004</li> <li>• Just for Kids Award MCAS Math Improvement, Massachusetts Business Alliance, 2004</li> <li>• Adequate Yearly Progress Math, Mass. Dept. of Ed., 2004, 2005, 2006</li> <li>• Neighborhood of Affordable Housing Schoolyard, Lenny Zakim Fund Award, 2006</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Harbor MCAS Improvement ELA, Mass. Dept. of Education, 2006</li> <li>• Champions in Action Award NECN Televised, New England Cable News, 2007</li> <li>• Earthworks-O'Donnell Community Science Award, Citizen's Bank, 2007</li> </ul>

## Donald McKay K-8 School

122 Cottage St, East Boston, MA 02128

617-635-8510

Almudena Abeyta, Principal

**Grades:** K2 - 8 **Hours:** 8:25am - 2:25pm

**Zone:** North **Triad:** A **Cluster:** 1

<p><b>Our School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Computer Lab</li> <li>• New England Scores Soccer</li> <li>• Sports 4 Kids</li> <li>• Physical Education</li> <li>• Readers' and Writers' Workshop</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• TERC Mathematics</li> <li>• YMCA after-school program</li> </ul> <p>Uniform Policy: Mandatory - Grades K-5: blue pants/skirt &amp; white shirt Grades 6-8: khaki pants/skirt &amp; white shirt</p>	<p><b>Our Students (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total enrollment: 622 students</p> <p>Black 2.3% Hispanic 89.2% White 7.4% Asian 1.0% Native American 0.2%</p> <p>Regular Education 62.5% Special Education 11.2% Bilingual Education 26.2%</p> <p>Average daily student attendance: 96.2% Students promoted to next grade: 94.7% Student mobility rate: 9.8% Annual student dropout rate: 0.0% Students suspended: 20</p>
<p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Americorps</li> <li>• Boston Celtics             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston Higher Ed. Partnership Research Collaboration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Boston Partners in Education</li> <li>• City Year</li> <li>• Harvard Graduate School of Education</li> <li>• Museum of Fine Arts</li> <li>• New England Scores</li> <li>• ReadBoston</li> <li>• Sports 4 Kids</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our Staff (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total staff: 60</p> <p>Black 11.7% Hispanic 20.0% White 65.0% Asian 3.3% Native American 0.0%</p> <p>Number of teachers: 44 Staff-to-student ratio: 1:15 Average daily staff attendance: 95.9% "Highly qualified" teachers: 94.0% Teachers licensed in Mass.: 100.0% Core academic courses taught by "highly qualified" teachers: 92.4%</p>
<p><b>Awards, Honors and Distinctions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth Compass School, Mass. Dept. of Education, 2004</li> <li>• National Title I Distinguished School Award, U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005</li> <li>• Vanguard Award, Mass. Dept. of Education, 2005</li> </ul>	

## Fenway High School

174 Ipswich Street, Fenway, MA 02215

617-635-9911

Peggy Kemp, Headmaster

Grades: 9 - 12 Hours: 8:40am - 3:30pm

Zone: High Triad: B Cluster: 7

<p><b>Our School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of first small “pilot schools” in Boston</li> <li>• Use of portfolios, projects and exhibitions</li> <li>• Six-week Internship program in Grade 12</li> <li>• Diverse student body</li> <li>• Emphasize College Access for All</li> <li>• Strong Advisory and Student Support</li> <li>• Dual Enrollment with Emmanuel College</li> <li>• Technology Goes Home for Families</li> </ul> <p>Uniform Policy: No Uniform</p>	<p><b>Our Students (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total enrollment: 288 students</p> <p>Black 45.5%</p> <p>Hispanic 36.1%</p> <p>White 14.9%</p> <p>Asian 2.8%</p> <p>Native American 0.7%</p> <p>Regular Education 82.9%</p> <p>Special Education 17.0%</p> <p>Bilingual Education 0.0%</p> <p>Average daily student attendance: 93.5%</p> <p>Students promoted to next grade: 100.0%</p> <p>Student mobility rate: 7.3%</p> <p>Annual student dropout rate: 1.4%</p> <p>Students suspended: N/A</p>
<p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston Teacher Residency</li> <li>• Children’s Hospital</li> <li>• Dana Farber Cancer Institute</li> <li>• Emmanuel College</li> <li>• Facing History and Ourselves</li> <li>• Harvard After School Initiative (HASI)</li> <li>• Museum of Science</li> <li>• Pfizer Research Technology Center (RTC)</li> <li>• Project Hip Hop</li> <li>• Tufts University, Department of Education</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our Staff (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total staff: 36      Number of teachers: 22</p> <p>Black 25.0%</p> <p>Hispanic 8.3%</p> <p>White 63.9%</p> <p>Asian 2.8%</p> <p>Native American 0.0%</p> <p>Staff-to-student ratio: 1:14 Average daily staff attendance: 97.2%</p> <p>“Highly qualified” teachers: 90.2%</p> <p>Teachers licensed in Mass.: 90.6%</p> <p>Core academic courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers: 80.6%</p>
<p><b>Awards, Honors and Distinctions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New American High School, U. S. Department of Education, 1996</li> <li>• Blue Ribbon School, Citizen School Academy, 2003</li> <li>• Breakthrough High School, NASSP, 2003</li> <li>• One of 9 Highest Performing MA Urban Schools, MassINC, 2003</li> <li>• Mentor School, Coalition of Essential Schools, 2004</li> <li>• National School Library Media Award, American Library Assoc., 2004</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reebok Human Rights Award for Teen Activists, Reebok, 2005</li> <li>• Antionetta Kelley, Payzant Community Service, Boston School Committee, 2007</li> <li>• Eileen Shakespear, Teacher of Year finalist, MA Department of Education, 2007</li> <li>• Massachusetts Commonwealth Compass School, MA Department of Education, 2007</li> </ul>

**TechBoston Academy**

9 Peacevale Rd, Dorchester, MA 02124

617-635-1615

Mary Skipper, Headmaster

Grades: 9 - 12 Hours: 8:30am- 4:30pm

Zone: High Triad: C Cluster: 10

<p><b>Our School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Pilot High School Of 370 Students</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary, Project-Based Curricula</li> <li>• College Preparatory With Technology Focus</li> <li>• Extended Day With Student Activities</li> <li>• Personalized Learning And Tutoring</li> <li>• Full Inclusion Program</li> <li>• Full Sports Program</li> <li>• Service Learning And Community Service</li> <li>• Laptops Provided For Every Student</li> <li>• Honors Courses And Advanced Placement Courses</li> </ul> <p>Uniform Policy: No Uniform</p>	<p><b>Our Students (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total enrollment: 338 students          Black 54.4% Hispanic 28.7%          White 8.9% Asian 8.0%          Native American 0.0%</p> <p>Regular Education 83.4%          Special Education 16.5%          Bilingual Education 0.0%</p> <p>Average daily student attendance: 92.8%          Students promoted to next grade: 95.8%          Student mobility rate: 10.6%          Annual student dropout rate: 2.0%          Students suspended: N/A</p>
<p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation</li> <li>• Boston Digital Bridge Foundation</li> <li>• Cisco Systems</li> <li>• Harvard University &amp; MIT</li> <li>• Hi-Q Computers</li> <li>• HP</li> <li>• TERC</li> <li>• Texas Instruments</li> <li>• The Boston Foundation</li> <li>• University of Massachusetts at Boston</li> </ul>	<p><b>Our Staff (AY 2006-2007)</b></p> <p>Total staff: 33 Number of teachers: 23          Black 27.3%          Hispanic 6.1%          White 66.7%          Asian 0.0%          Native American 0.0%</p> <p>Staff-to-student ratio: 1:16          Average daily staff attendance: 97.6%          “Highly qualified” teachers: 89.7%          Teachers licensed in Mass.: 91.2%          Core academic courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers: 89.0%</p>
<p><b>Awards, Honors and Distinctions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model Secondary School Award, Gates Foundation, 2002</li> <li>• City Excellence Award, City of Boston, 2003</li> <li>• Nominee of Compass Award, DOE, 2003</li> <li>• Eye on Education Featured School, Eye on Education, 2004</li> <li>• Teacher of the Year, BPS, 2004</li> <li>• Gates Foundation Innovative High School, Gates Foundation &amp; ERS, 2005</li> <li>• Innovative High School Case Study, Dell, 2005</li> <li>• MTV Featured School, MTV, 2006</li> <li>• Nominee Model Secondary School, United States Dept. of Education, 2006</li> <li>• Top 5 Most Improved MCAS Scores, Mass. Dept. of Education, 2006</li> </ul>	



### **The Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy**

was established in 1989 at the University of Massachusetts by the Massachusetts State Legislature at the behest of Latino community leaders and scholars in response to a need for improved understanding of the Latino experience in the Commonwealth. The mission of the Institute is to inform policy makers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and provide this community with information and analysis necessary for effective participation in public policy development.

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